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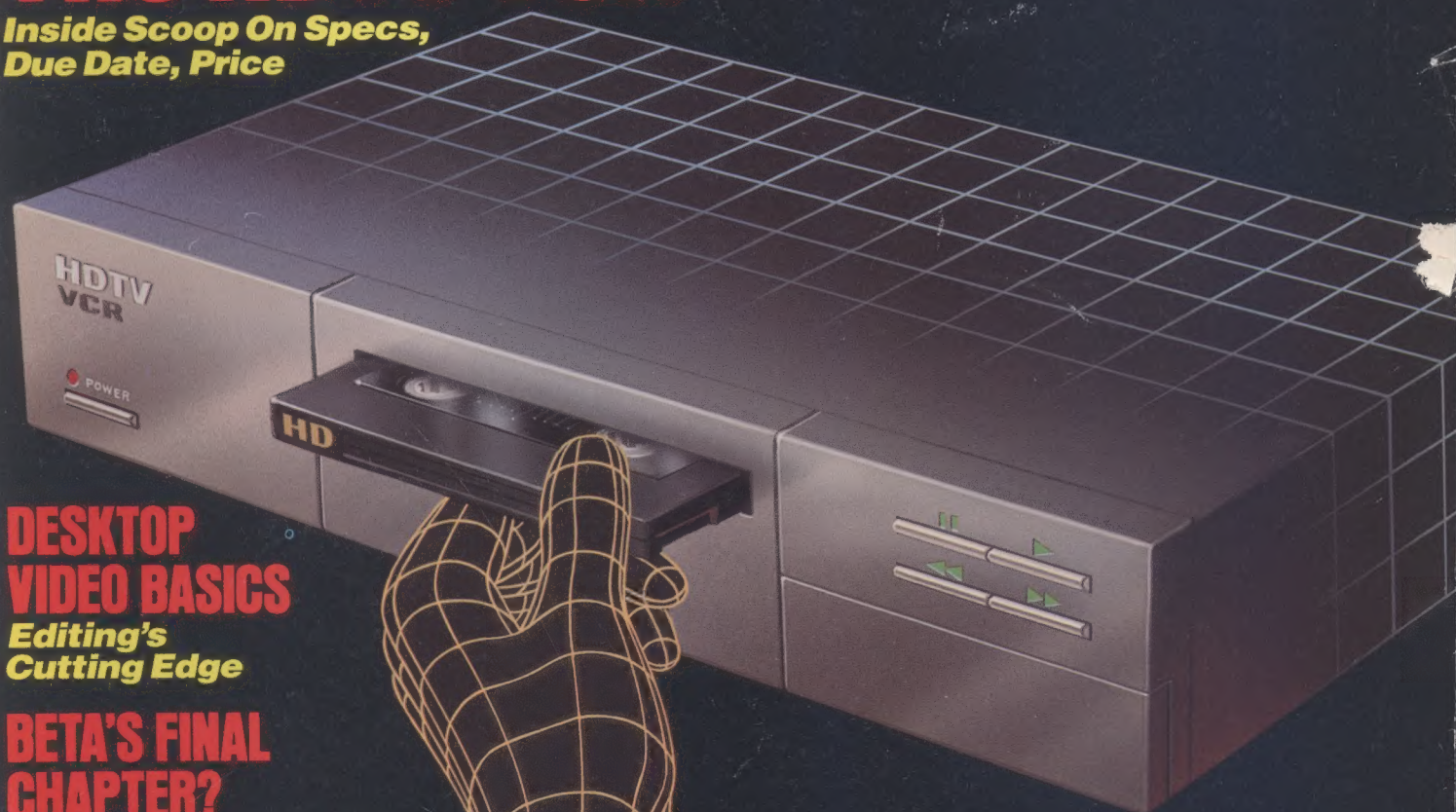
VIDEO

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magazine

The HDTV VCR

**Inside Scoop On Specs,
Due Date, Price**



DESKTOP VIDEO BASICS

**Editing's
Cutting Edge**

BETA'S FINAL CHAPTER?

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The Process Revealed

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Cover:
A speculative look at
the first high-definition
VCR. Illustration by
Dale Gustafson

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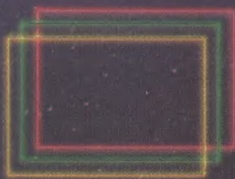
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*Letterbox

CHANNEL ONE



The once and future VCR

You don't hear much about the venerable videocassette recorder in the incessant coverage of the electronic superhighway that has so dominated the general press in recent months. It's almost as though pundits in the mainstream media have already laid to rest the machine that is the cornerstone of the video revolution. Well, to paraphrase Mark Twain, the reports of the VCR's demise are greatly exaggerated.

In this issue we have reports on two types of machine that will serve as bookends for what may someday be viewed as the Stone Age of home video—the videotape era. It all started in the '70s with the Betamax which, to many folks' surprise, continues to enjoy an active cult following. Sony keeps a handful of models in its line to satisfy today's modest demand and, despite sales figures that are vastly diminished from Beta's halcyon days, the format may occupy its narrow niche right into the 21st century. In "Desperately Seeking Beta" (page 42), Jonathan Takiff delivers an update that Beta loyalists will not want to miss.

But home video is becoming a digital medium and when the HDTV standard is settled by the Federal Communications Commission (probably late this year), the rush to bring high-definition televisions to the home will begin. Two things will remain constant in video's digital era—the desire to record programs off the air and to capture memories using camcorders.

And while it's likely that the future will bring optical-disc and chip-based recording formats, in the short term—the first decade or so of the HDTV era—it's likely the dominant recording format will still be videotape. But videotaping in the digital domain presents a new set of challenges that are now being addressed by engineers in development labs around the world.

In "The HDTV VCR: Designing the First Hi-Def Deck" (page 34), Senior Editor Brent Butterworth brings us up to speed on developments that, before too long, will lead to a hot new product category. Since the development cycle is in its early stages we've also made a few suggestions about some directions we think designers should head to make the HDTV VCR most useful for the next generation of videophiles.

If it's editing you're interested in with your present VCR and camcorder, you'll be interested in Cliff Roth's desktop video primer "The ABCs of Desktop Editing" on page 38.

Finally, if laserdiscs represent your preferred way to watch feature films in your home theater, you'll be as fascinated as we were with Senior Editor Kenneth Korman's report on how these remarkable shiny discs get made in "A Pressing Matter" on page 46.

James M. Barry
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VIDEO

magazine

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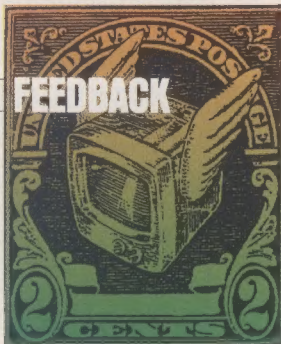
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Amigas, toons, laserdiscs and lieutenants

Amiga update

As a video consultant I sometimes recommend Amiga equipment for desktop video production. Your December '93 issue ("Power Presents") mentioned the Amiga 600 as an under-\$1,000 desktop video system. That information is dated. For under \$600, Commodore now offers the entry-level Amiga 1200. The A1200 is several times faster than the A600, and offers vastly improved graphics and animation power. Instead of the *Deluxe Paint IV* software the article recommended, the A1200 owner can take advantage of *Deluxe Paint IV AGA*, which uses the Amiga's recently upgraded 16.7 million color palette. Result: A basic Amiga desktop video system with video encoder and photorealistic paint/animation software now can be acquired for less than \$800.

Ron Legro
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

The whole toon truth

I applaud Tom Soter's article "Toon Revolution" (Nov. '93). It was informative and complimentary to animation in general and classic animation in particular. The article failed to mention how to contact The Whole Toon Catalog though. The address is Box 1910, Seattle, WA 98111. The phone number is 206-441-4130.

Randy Bray
Klamath Fall, Oregon

Livin' large

I agree with James Barry's article "Building a Better Disc" ("Channel One," Oct. '93). Smaller is not necessarily better. But newer is not necessarily better either. Trying to shrink digital video information onto a five-inch disc playable by a \$200 CD-I attachment is simply asking too much of consumers. Laserdiscs have an advantage over smaller audio discs. They don't skip as easily, they won't get stuck inside the machine as often, and they're heavier and more durable. Since we already have a standard in picture quality and audio, let's keep it that way.

Edward Wallace
Hattiesburg, Mississippi

Bad reaction

Your favorable review of *Bad Lieutenant* (Sept. '93) has prompted this letter. As I read the review, I thought that this was possibly a small movie that was critically worthwhile, but that fell through the cracks. Thus, I went out of my way to find a video store that carried the NC-17 theatrical version. All I viewed was a pitiful picture showing scenes of depravity which glorified the drug, gambling and sex addictions of the main character. The review suggests that the main character perhaps experienced a revelation and gained some insight into the incorrectness of his life. I missed this aspect completely. Freeing two men who raped a nun by giving them bus tickets and \$30,000 in drug money is neither intelligent nor praiseworthy.

The movie industry is in a sad state. Few movies are being made that are truly entertaining or thought provoking, but I look to your staff to identify mindless trash when it exists.

Chris Noell
Cincinnati, Ohio



Top cop? Not! Harvey Keitel's performance in *Bad Lieutenant* outraged a Cincinnati reader.

Salute from a laser-head

I thoroughly enjoy your magazine, especially your support of the laserdisc format. I've been a laser-head since 1979, sticking with it through programming and availability problems, laser rot, and

less-than-universal retailer coverage. Thanks for hanging in there with us. Keep up the good work.

James C. Lamb
Phoenix, Arizona

Laser-dis

Regardless of its quality, I have decided for the time being to forego the laserdisc format for two reasons. 1) Even though laserdiscs are the size of vinyl LPs, they still require one or more side changes. 2) The elitism embodied in the format. I resent the fact that expanded and/or letterboxed editions of movies like *Aliens* and *The Abyss* are available only on laserdisc and not to us mere mortals with VCRs. True, certain features such as alternate audio tracks can't be duplicated on videotape, but other extras that are included on laserdiscs can.

Les Leist
Alexandria, Virginia

The simple solution

"Showdown at Compatability Gap" (Oct. '93) doesn't properly address the point from the consumer's standpoint. The solution is really very simple: each cable customer should receive all the channels he subscribes to unscrambled, and on the channels to which they are assigned. There would be no need for a cable box in the house (especially not one for each TV set and VCR) unless there's a TV that isn't cable-ready. How the cable companies provide this should be up to them. They're the ones charging for and receiving money for the service, and the ones who should be responsible for providing it. If each customer would refuse to purchase any cable programming that requires a cable box, we would see the solution appear immediately. As long as consumers refuse to stand up for their rights, they will be taken advantage of by the cable companies.

Robert A. Gould
Kaneohe, Hawaii

Video Magazine welcomes your comments. Address correspondence to Feedback, Video Magazine, 460 West 34 Street, New York, NY 10001.



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SHUTTLE (also on the remote) gives you variable slow motion



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ED of the class

►► We've been hearing lots of noise about the information highway and interactive TV, but so far it's mostly talk. One notable exception is ED, a new product from a Chicago company called VisCorp. The great thing about ED is that it doesn't require any leap in technology or an investment in fiber-optics. In fact, if you've got a phone line and a TV, you'll be able to use ED as soon as it arrives this summer.

ED comes with an alphanumeric remote control and circuitry that performs the functions of a cable-ready tuner, a computer, a fax/modem and a telephone. This lets it access your cable system and online computer services.

What can you do with ED? For starters, you can dial into services like CompuServe without hassling with a modem and a communications program. Text appears on the TV screen, and you can enter commands and type in messages with the remote control. You can also fax these messages to any fax machine, and you can use an optional pen mouse to fax handwritten messages.

An optional credit card reader interfaces ED with home shopping and pay-per-view services. ED includes personal assistant functions like an onscreen calculator, a scheduler and a message center. A tiny mic on the front even lets it work as a telephone, and it controls volume and channel on your TV.

How much will this impressive interactive power cost? VisCorp cofounder Roger Remillard says his company is still trying to figure that out, but he's shooting for \$200. —**Brent Butterworth**



Katherine Aldridge in
Haunted Harbor

SERIAL KILLER

►► Katherine Aldridge made only 21 movies in a seven-year career, earning little more than a footnote in the history of feature films. But mention her name to fans of the old Hollywood serials, and watch their eyes light up: Aldridge played the title role in one of the most popular serials ever made, *Nyoka and the Tigermen*, thereby earning cult status to rival that of serial kings like Buster Crabbe. Republic Pictures Home Video has just added to Aldridge's mystique with the release of *Haunted Harbor*, a 1944 serial that finds our heroine battling modern-day pirates.

Now 79 years old, Aldridge expresses amazement at the enduring popularity of her serials. "We worked very fast and hard to do 15 chapters," she recalls. "I think we shot them in five or six weeks, and then we'd go on to something else, so I never even had a chance to see *Haunted Harbor*. But I remember we had the silliest looking sea monster I'd ever seen."

One of just a handful of surviving serial stars, Aldridge has spoken at conventions all over the world. Today her major concern is preserving her family's 18th-century ancestral home in Virginia, but the film business still seems to follow her around—Mel Gibson recently approached her in hopes of renting her house in Maine while shooting *The Man Without a Face*. —**Bruce Eder**



THE NUMBER

405,000,000

—Estimated number of blank videotapes sold in the U.S. in 1993.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Interactivity will be an evolution to a revolution."

—JOHN EGAN,

President and CEO, Antec International, commenting on the impact of the "Nintendo generation" on future TV services.

Join the club

►► Laserdisc fans have long requested a complete catalog of the Voyager Company's 250-plus titles, including the beloved Criterion Collec-



Complete and Unabridged: Voyager's new catalog.

tion. Last year's near-comprehensive *Criterion Goes to the Movies* CD-ROM fits the bill, but only for those set up to run Macintosh multimedia. Now a quick trip to your local laser outlet will yield a free copy of Voyager's first full-color, 76-page printed catalog. Background information is provided for each title, including special features like analog-track commentaries, trailers and outtakes.

Bound into the catalog is an invitation to join the Criterion Collector's Club, a "frequent buyer" program intended to save laserphiles as

much as 20 percent on Criterion purchases. Other benefits include catalog updates and private sales. For more information, call 800-446-2001 between 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. eastern time. —KK

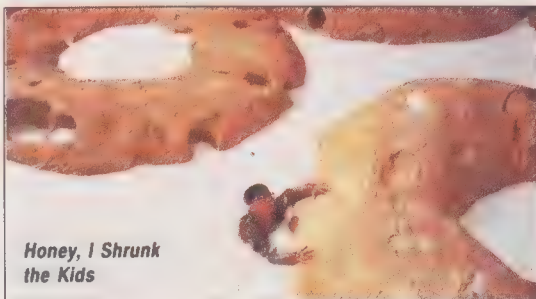
Video for the blind

►► For better or worse, television dominates our lives, providing most of our information, entertainment and culture. As that influence has increased, so have the isolation and frustration of the 11 million visually impaired Americans who, according to a survey by the American Foundation of the Blind, watch as much television as other people.

In 1990, Boston PBS station WGBH launched the Emmy-winning Descriptive Video Service (DVS). Via the separate audio program (SAP) channel available on stereo TVs and VCRs, DVS soundtracks describe visual elements—facial expressions and body language, costumes, sets, scene changes—during pauses in dialog. The descriptions are written in a prose-like style to help bring listeners more fully into the program.

The strong positive response has prompted DVS to expand into home video. Nearly 50 titles are now available, a total expected to double in the coming year. The catalog features Hercule Poirot and Sherlock Holmes mysteries, popular PBS documentaries and children's shows, and a broad selection of hit movies including *Beauty and the Beast*, *Fatal Attraction*, *Field of Dreams*, *Ghost*, *The Godfather*, *Honey I Shrunk the Kids*, *The Hunt For Red October* and *Sister Act*. No special equipment is required, and DVS tapes cost the same as regular versions, with most titles in the \$14.95 to \$24.95 range. For more information, or to hear an audio sample, call 800-333-1203.

—M. Faust

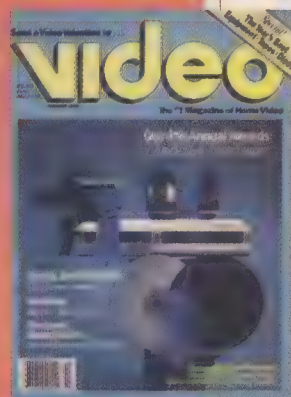


Honey, I Shrunk the Kids

TIMESHIFT TEN YEARS AGO IN VIDEO MAGAZINE

"Every year brings improvement in video gear, but some years—like 1983—show more progress than others. Winners of our best equipment of the year awards include

Sony's SL-2700 VCR, our favorite from the initial batch of four Beta Hi-fi decks; Sony's BMC-110, the first and only one-piece camera/recorder on the consumer market; Akai's VS-7U, a VHS VCR that edged out the competi-



February, 1983

tion in both picture quality and sound; and Panasonic's PV-6500, a portable VHS deck with stereo sound that works with wonderful accessories such as an edit controller. Our favorite videocassettes of the year are *The Road Warrior*, *One From the Heart*, *Barry Lyndon*, *Jazz in America: Dizzy Gillespie and The Outsiders*. The best laserdiscs are *Space Archive: Volume 1*, *The Thing*, *Earth Wind and Fire in Concert*, *An Evening With Robin Williams* and *Judy Garland in Concert*...Plans are afoot to bring books, magazines, newspapers, movies, phonograph records, video games and computer programs into your home electronically, so that you never have to leave your living room...Since courtship is the highest form of advertising art, why shouldn't modern courtship use advertising's greatest tool? Allow us to suggest a homemade video valentine."

SATELLITE TV



U P D A T E

Not exactly magic...but close. Multiplex HBO® & Cinemax®. A deal so good you'll pinch yourself to make sure it's real. More than just 2 channels, Multiplex delivers 8 different viewing choices: 5 of HBO and 3 of Cinemax. That means you always get 8 different programs to choose from. *But it's only available through satellite...*

Cutting Edge Technology.

If you're looking for the very best, this is it. Home satellite systems deliver channels and programming options (like Multiplex!) you can't get elsewhere. Plus audio/video reception quality you simply have to see to believe.

Check It Out! Get in on all this great excitement. Shop around. Talk to your local satellite retailer...or give us a call for more details. We'd love to talk with you...

For Details, Call HBO Direct
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Late Breaking News

CONCEDING that sales levels didn't meet expectations, Thomson Consumer Electronics lowered the suggested retail price of its ProScan CinemaScreen 16:9 widescreen sets by \$500 to \$4,499, which should mean a street price under \$4,000. Additionally, the company is boosting the promotional giveaway package for each set to \$500 worth of free laserdiscs or an RCA LDR500 laserdisc player, valued at \$750.

However, there are a few high-profile consumers who are enamored of the new widescreen sets. According to Thomson officials, Janet Jackson bought one and Frank Sinatra did it his way—he purchased six of the sets.

RUBBER DUCKY VISION?

A large Japanese plumbing supply company called Toto now offers a Sony-made four-inch LCD TV, which it claims can survive an occasional dunking in the bathtub. Battery powered, we presume. Don't try this at home!

PANASONIC'S NEW LINE OF camcorders will again put an emphasis on user-friendly features. All its new models, for example, will possess a nine-speed variable zoom control, a built-in lens cap linked to the power switch, a 49mm lens thread to accommodate filters made for 35mm SLR cameras, and a 10-second demonstration mode that illustrates (for you or a sales clerk) the camcorder's chief features. Just look through the viewfinder or plug into a TV screen. In addition, both its camcorders and VCRs will have built-in diagnostic systems to help technicians track down tricky service problems.

VIDEONICS' MX-1 AUDIO/VIDEO mixer, perhaps the year's most eagerly awaited video product, is finally here. When we attended a sneak preview of the MX-1 in early December, Videonics said it expected to start shipping before the end of '93.

The MX-1 is like a do-it-all studio in a box—add a couple of VCRs and a camcorder, and you're set. The MX-1 mixes among four video signals (S-video or composite) using wipes, dissolves, fly-aways and about 200 more fancy scene transition effects. It auto-

matically mixes audio along with the video, and performs chroma keying (the effect used to put computer-generated maps behind weatherpersons).

For months, we've been hearing questions about the MX-1's picture quality. Based on our initial impressions, it looks pretty good. It's very clean—it adds almost no visible noise, even on a red field. Its demerits seem to be a mild decrease in detail and a slight darkening of the image. We'll have a complete review ASAP.

THE INGENIOUS USE BY SHARP and Sony of LCD screens as oversized viewfinders has triggered a flurry of how-can-we-top-this R&D. Both Canon and Panasonic are exploring camcorder designs that will also use large LCD screens, with Canon's effort possibly seeing daylight later this year. "We're looking at something original, which is easier to say than do," says Stan Hametz, vice president of Panasonic's VHS division.

One feature Canon will implement later this year is the lithium ion battery developed by Sony. The batteries are lighter and easier to keep fully charged



Trickle-Down Ergonomics: Sharp's ViewCam

than nickel-cadmiums, and Canon believes consumers will find them more reliable.

SONY HAS INTRODUCED IN Japan a new Hi8 editing system designed to complement its prosumer CCD-VX3 Hi8 camcorder. At about \$10,000, the system is not inexpensive, but it includes a new Hi8 VCR, an edit controller, an A/V mixer and a titler. The VCR has RC time code, digital noise and chroma-bleed reduction, and time-base correction. The controller, which also uses RC time code, can run three VCRs (or camcorders) and provides A/B roll editing. The system offers jog/shuttle control, an audio mixer and A/V fade functions. Each A/B transition can be a cut, a dissolve or a wipe. The titler has a GPI input connection that can be triggered by the controller. There's no word yet on the system's U.S. availability.

Even Orson Welles didn't sound this real.



A new reason to be afraid of the dark.

Crunching footsteps behind you. Laser beams shooting over your head. Just a typical night at home with Adcom's home theater GTP-600 tuner/preamplifier. At Adcom's level of critically acclaimed performance it doesn't just produce surround sound. It creates effects that are out of this world.

The award-winning GTP-600 and an Adcom power amplifier give you the control to create a sonic experience that surpasses anything you've ever heard in a movie theater.

Award-winning technology takes you to the outer limits.

Providing switching for up to four video sources and four audio sources, the GTP-600 gives you the flexibility to customize your audio/video system for years to come. Composite or S-video connections provide a high definition signal path for maximum video quality. And with features like Adcom's exclusive Cinema Surround circuitry and Dolby Pro Logic® decoding, the GTP-600

brings the drama of home theater to your fingertips. Preprogrammed DSP(Digital Signal Processing) modes such as Concert Hall, Nightclub, Stadium and Five-Channel Stereo surround, let you create a variety of custom-tailored, psychoacoustically correct listening environments.

These features couple ideally with the GTP-600's advanced, programmable remote which lets you command up to eight additional

system components for complete home theater control.

Surround yourself now at your Adcom dealer.

Preview the new GTP-600 tuner/preamplifier at your authorized Adcom dealer today. But be careful, you might want to leave the lights on.

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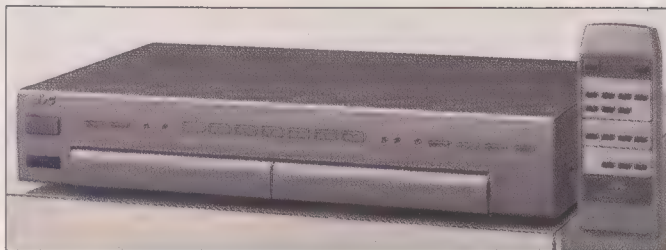
Atari returns with a 64-bit Jaguar

◀ LIGHT YEARS FROM PONG

Atari's new game player is the Jaguar, a 64-bit system designed to go head-to-head with Super Nintendo and Sega Genesis players. A battle game called *Cybermorph* comes with the system. Jaguar is priced at \$249, while compatible games will range from \$39 to \$69. Atari plans to add a disc player to go with the system later this year that will run conventional CDs as well as Jaguar game CDs. (For additional information, circle 104 on the Reader Service Card.)

▼ ROUTE JVC

JVC's JX-S700 A/V selector (\$600) has seven video inputs and four outputs as well as a monitor/receiver output and a Y/C separator for S-video. A built-in Y/C mixer allows S-video to be sent to regular 8mm or VHS components without changing connections. Since it can route two signals independently of each other, it's like having two switchers. A processor in/out terminal lets you edit among four sources. (For additional information, circle 100 on the Reader Service Card.)



▲ CENTER OF ATTENTION

B&W's 2000 IFS center-channel speaker (\$199) is timbre-matched to its 2000 series speakers. There are dual bass/midrange drivers which deliver a frequency response of 76 Hz-25kHz at -6dB. The 2000 IFS handles continuous power from 25 to 100 watts. It's compact too, measuring 6x18x9 inches. (For additional information, circle 103 on the Reader Service Card.)

◀ LUG IT OR LEAVE IT

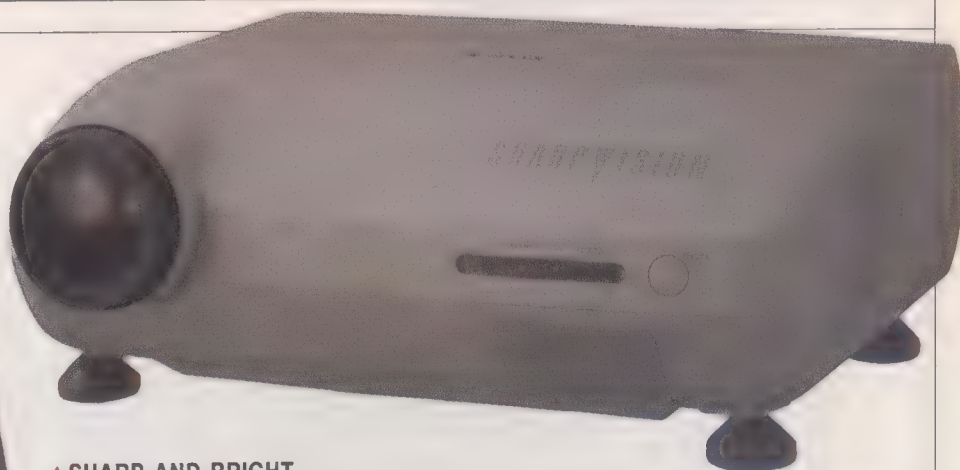
Ambico's new line of Verte camcorder bags features a removable bottom section. The bags also have adjustable inside pockets, and come in sizes for both compact (model V-0494) and midsize (model V-0493) camcorders. The compact bag is priced at \$75, while the midsize bag is \$80. (For additional information, circle 101 on the Reader Service Card.)



▶ SHOOT AND EDIT

Goldstar's GVC-C425 (\$800) is a full-size VHS camcorder with an 8:1 power zoom lens. For those who prefer the stability and feel of a VHS camcorder, it's designed to comfortably hug the shoulder. With features like a flying erase head, audio and video dub, and a character generator, it can also be used for editing. Earphone and microphone jacks improve your control over your audio. (For additional information, circle 105 on the Reader Service Card.)





▲ SHARP AND BRIGHT

Sharp's new XV-H35U LCD video projector offers increased brightness and the option of ceiling mounting. Sharp says its "Micro-optic" technology processes light passing through the LCD panels more effectively than earlier projectors, producing a 25 percent boost in brightness. Zoom and focus controls are available through the remote. The unit weighs around 24 pounds and projects images ranging in size from 25 to 200 inches. Features include multiple inputs (including S-video), variable masking for projecting in different aspect ratios, and a built-in speaker. (For additional information, circle 108 on the Reader Service Card.)

▲ THE CENTER OF INFINITY

Infinity's Infinitesimal Video center channel speaker (\$299) is matched to its popular Infinitesimal IV speakers. It centers a 1-inch tweeter between 5-1/4-inch woofers and has a frequency response of 100 Hz to 45 kHz at ± 2 dB. The shielded speaker rests on a bracket that rotates the speaker vertically for the proper listening angle. (For additional information, circle 106 on the Reader Service Card.)



◀ COMPUTER EDITING

FutureVideo's EditLink 2200 series edit controllers are plug-in cards for IBM 386/486 or compatible PCs that control two VCRs. Designed for consumer and prosumer equipment, the controllers work with over 100 models regardless of format. Three models are available, including the \$695 EditLink 2200. The 2200/TC (\$1,195) reads SMPTE time code, while the 2200/TCG (\$1,395) shown here reads and writes SMPTE time code. All work with Sony's industrial 8mm time code and RC time code, and require software capable of creating edit lists, like FutureVideo's EDL-2000/FX Edit List Manager. (For additional information, circle 109 on the Reader Service Card.)



◀ DOUBLE BUBBLE TRIPOD

The Coast MTR-2140 tripod (\$119) has a large panhead and two bubble levels for horizontal and vertical balance. It extends to 63 inches and folds down to 27 inches. The leg span is larger than normal with a new twist lock for stability. (For additional information, circle 105 on the Reader Service Card.)

▲ SAMSUNG ADDS JOG/SHUTTLE

Samsung's VR8903 is a four-head hi-fi VHS VCR that features a jog/shuttle dial and VCR Plus with cable box control. Front audio/video jacks team with the jog/shuttle dial for easy editing. The remote is also a universal TV remote. The deck is priced at \$599. (For additional information, circle 110 on the Reader Service Card.)

▼ AUDIOPHILE PREAMP

The Rotel RC990BX preamplifier (\$749) offers volume control through a remote control. In the name of signal integrity, source selection is manual. Six input sources, including two tape loops, are available. (For additional information, circle 107 on the Reader Service Card.)



Hard copy with Instant Replay's Caption Writer VCR

Years before Congress ordered manufacturers to build closed-caption decoders into all TV sets 13 inches and larger, Instant Replay, a small Miami company, was selling closed-caption VCRs to hearing-impaired viewers and institutional customers. By customizing generic, Matsushita-built VCRs, Instant Replay gave them the ability to receive closed-captions from any video source, from broadcast and cable TV to videotape and laserdisc output routed through the VCR's video input.

Now that the industry has fallen into step by making access to captions easier, Instant Replay (800-749-8779) has a new wrinkle: the CW-911 Caption Writer, a VCR that can print instant transcripts of TV programs through an ordinary computer printer.

Imagine the possibilities: accurate jokes from the monologues of Jay Leno and David Letterman, your own script of a favorite *Seinfeld*, no frantic scribbling of recipes during a cooking show, lyrics from hit songs (many music videos are captioned), an immediate copy of a presidential address, the full text of a provocative 60 Minutes expose. As long as the show is captioned—and more are all the time—it's yours to have on paper.

That's the theory. In practice, it's not quite this simple because using the VCR involves some acquaintance with computers. Looked at just as a VCR, the Caption Writer (\$1,495) is far from fancy. Built around a center-loading, four-head VHS unit sourced from Matsushita, it has an eight-event/one-month timer, freeze frame, slow motion, on-screen menus, monaural sound—a typical lineup of basic features.

Nothing sets it apart from a dozen other look-alike products, until you notice the three rocker switches—labeled CAP, PNT and SAV for captions, print and print saver—on the left front panel. The back presents a stranger sight: computer interface ports for both parallel and serial outputs, just to the right of the familiar audio/video jacks.

The VCR is intended to be connected directly to a printer, using the parallel

port, or to a computer, using the serial port. Printers connected directly to the VCR must be dot-matrix and DOS-compatible. Once you're linked, simply flip on the VCR's caption and print buttons. If the show you're watching has captions, they'll appear on the TV screen and start rolling out of your printer. Turning on the print saver key instructs the printer to use the full width

they enter the computer. It's for booting in DOS-based systems. Users of Windows and Macintosh systems need to conform the protocol for their communications port, much as if they were using a modem, to accept the VCR's ASCII data stream. Once loaded, TV text can be displayed on the screen, printed, stored in a file, or imported to word-processing or other application programs.



Instant Word Play:
The CW-911 has three print controls on the left front panel and serial and parallel ports in the rear for connecting to a computer or a DOS-compatible printer.

of the paper, instead of simply duplicating the narrow format of the closed-caption TV display, which only runs a few words per line.

My initial attempt at printing ran right into a glitch. The captions were printing, but the sheet-fed paper didn't advance as the printing continued. It turned out the printer needed a simple line feed command, information not in the instructions. With the adjustment made, the Caption Writer worked fine.

The serial hookup connecting the CW-911 to my IBM-clone PC was equally successful. However, the cable ran from the VCR to the port normally used by the mouse, effectively disabling the mouse. If you have a Macintosh, you needn't worry, since Mac mice have their own ports. You will, however, need your own printer or computer cables, since none comes with the VCR.

A 3.5-inch disk that does come with the VCR carries a simple Instant Replay utility called Capwrite that offers basic options for processing the captions as

Once I installed Capwrite in my hard drive, as instructed, I started surfing around the channels. First, I tuned to a captioned baseball game. It was the last game of the World Series between the Blue Jays and the Phillies. The play-by-play instantly began to zip across the full width of the computer screen and the printer began to hum: "It's just a matter of when Alomar is going to run," read the text of announcer Sean McDonough's commentary. "Cito Gaston was telling us before the game that the green light is always on for guys like Alomar, White, Molitor. He rarely gives the stop sign. It's their option whether to run or not." This was nifty stuff. The novelty of being able to capture right in my computer moments of history as they were happening was a kick.

I turned to other Saturday shows, and encountered a local news roundup ("Astronauts on the space shuttle conducted hands-on tests with rodents on day six of the mission."), NBC's *Sisters*

continued on page 23

The RCA 35" Home Theatre. So real, it's scary.



Watching a ship on a stormy sea on the RCA Home Theatre is like being there without getting drenched or feeling seasick. Our new Optimum Contrast Screen* gives you blacker blacks and more brilliant whites for a picture so clear and bright, you can almost feel the waves crashing around you. See the Home Theatre™ at an RCA dealer. And go sailing without ever leaving your house. **Changing Entertainment. Again.™ RCA**

Using outboard D/A convertors to smooth laserdisc sound

In many ways, home theater takes its sonic cues from audio's high end, that cutting-edge faction of hardcore audiophiles who stop at nothing to get the cleanest, clearest sound from their hi-fi rigs. Subwoofers, high-quality loudspeakers, surround sound—all of these home theater must-haves were part'n'parcel of the audiophile trip back when "home theater" meant Uncle Hymie doing hand shadow puppets of a barking dog against the rumpus room wall after dinner.

So what are hardcore audionuts doing these days to get the best possible sound quality from their systems? They're adding separate digital-to-analog convertors (D/As or DACs, for short) to their CD players, and hearing their favorite CDs as if for the very first time. And just as home theater took several key aspects of the audiophile trip to help make movies sound mo' better,

the rest of your system.

But if all laserdisc players have their own internal D/A convertor, why do you need a separate one? Because like everything else in life, 90 percent of the internal D/As in laserdisc players are garbage, designed to do a reasonable job as cheaply as possible while the bulk of the player's internal circuitry is devoted to video. A separate D/A contains much higher quality chips and associated circuitry for better audio performance.

Before you run to your local hi-fi hut to buy a separate D/A, you'll need to check your laserdisc player's back panel for an output jack labeled "digital audio out" or simply "digital out." Be warned that not all laserdisc players have a digital output—if yours doesn't, sorry, you won't be able to use an external D/A. Cry, kick, scream, then powder your nose and go buy one that does.

There are two different types of digi-

connect an outboard D/A. (Editor's note: Some Video Magazine staffers disagree, insisting that despite Toslink's limitations, using it with a good outboard D/A can offer improvements over a poor internal D/A.)

If you're lucky, your laserdisc player also has an electrical digital output, identified by its standard RCA-type output jack. This is by far the preferable method of digital interconnection, but it's only found on a few players—notably those made by Philips and Theta, and Pioneer's CLD-97. You'll also need a 75-ohm video cable with RCA plugs to connect your laserdisc player to the digital input of a D/A convertor. For the best possible performance, I recommend Canare's precision 75-ohm cable (\$35), available mail-order from HAVE Inc. at 518-828-2000. The Canare is also an excellent video cable—I use it for both applications in my system.

As for specific D/A recommendations, I've found several standouts that all deliver exceptional sound within their price ranges. Audio Alchemy, a made-in-the-US-of-A manufacturer of terrific digital gear for those on a tight budget, has a really sweet little \$199 D/A cleverly named the DAC-in-the-Box. Featuring high-quality critical components usually found on much more expensive convertors (like precision 18-bit Analog Devices D/A convertors), the li'l Audio Alchemy offers the biggest bang you're going to find anywhere near its price.

Audio Alchemy also makes a neat \$300 unit it calls the DTI, for Digital Transmission Interface. Not a D/A convertor, the DTI goes between the digital output of a laserdisc or CD player and the digital input of an outboard D/A. It reduces a form of digital timing error called jitter. For laserdisc fans, the real benefit of the DTI is that it can take a laserdisc player's lowly Toslink optical output and convert it to a low-jitter electrical output for better sound.

At the top of the heap, the audiophile D/As I like best are those by Theta: its flagship \$4,000 Generation III and \$2,000 DS Pro Basic II. Both are my references for the ultimate digital playback in their price categories, which are admittedly at the "Say what?" level. Where the Thetas kill the competition

continued on page 33



Digital Dynamos: Audio Alchemy's DAC-in-the-Box and DTI make quality digital sound affordable.

many home theater perfectionists are discovering that adding an outboard D/A to a laserdisc player gives them the next step up in sound quality.

What exactly is a "separate digital-to-analog convertor," you glare, Mastercard still smarting after your last order from Ken Crane's? Laserdisc players can basically be broken down into three sections: the transport that reads the FM video and digital audio data off the spinning disc, the video circuitry and the D/A. The D/A converts the digital data into the analog audio signal you feed to

tal outputs on laserdisc players: optical and electrical. Most laserdisc players with digital outputs use the optical Toslink connector, which uses a relatively low-grade plastic fiber-optic cable to link up the laserdisc player and the D/A convertor. The Toslink connection has a well-deserved bad rep in high-end audio circles—Toslink was designed to be cheap, not good, and can seriously degrade the sound when used to transmit digital audio. Me, I think you're better off just listening to the laserdisc player's own internal D/A than using Toslink to

Ray Manzarek
changed music.
We're making
sure he doesn't
do it as often.

Ray Manzarek, co-founder of
the Doors, keyboardist, composer,
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The new MB-4s plays 7 CDs
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1. Purchase a Nakamichi MusicBank CD Player (models eligible: MB-1, MB-2, MB-3, MB-4s, or SoundSpace 7) between November 1, 1993 and May 15, 1994.
2. Fill out the name and address form on this coupon completely.
3. Attach a copy of the sales receipt with the store name, purchase date, serial number, and price clearly legible, and mail to:
Nakamichi America Corporation, 955 Francisco St., Torrance, CA 90502 Attention: MFSL CD Promotion.
4. Claims for this offer must be postmarked no later than June 15, 1994.
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VM

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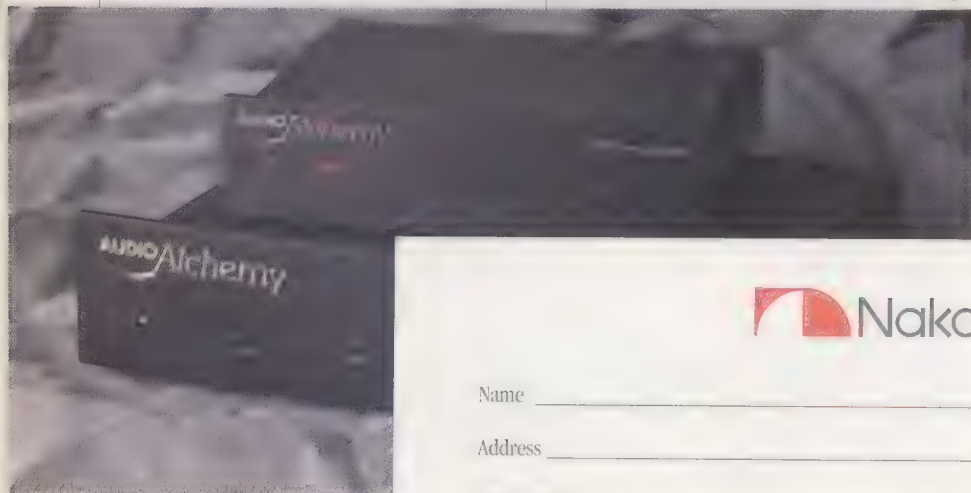
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City, State, Zip _____

Phone (_____) _____

Date of Purchase _____

Place of Purchase _____

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City, State, Zip _____

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Ray Manzarek
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We're making
sure he doesn't
do it as often.

*Ray Manzarek, co-founder of
the Doors, keyboardist, composer,
producer. Nakamichi aficionado.
The new MB-4s plays 7 CDs
while the MusicBank Organizer
stores their cases.*



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DIGITAL
HOLLYWOOD
ENTERTAINMENT

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Q&A

Automatic zooming, A/B switches and mic jack problems

Q I have a new Panasonic PV-53 VHS-C camcorder, which I really like, especially the color viewfinder. But sometimes when I turn on the power, the lens zooms back to wide-angle by itself. My dealer says all camcorders do this, but he couldn't explain why.

G. Grimaldi
Denver, Colorado

A Like many, but not all, other camcorders, the PV-53 uses a full-range inner-focus lens system, a design that has a number of advantages. First and foremost, you can focus on anything between super-close macro (when the lens is at wide-angle) and infinity without making any adjustments. Second, the sealed design of the lens allows it to be integrated into the camcorder's body, creating a smaller package. Finally, it takes much less battery power to correct the focus.

However, wild and extreme focus changes can occur when shooting under dim light. Since the "full range" feature is optimized to work best at the wide-angle position, where depth of field is also at a maximum, many newer designs (like those from JVC and Sharp) automatically, and usefully, reset the lens to wide-angle when the power is turned on.

Q While I subscribe to cable TV, I also have a roof antenna to pick up some VHF and UHF stations that aren't on my cable system. For the past four years, I've been able to simplify choosing or recording either signal source, since my Mitsubishi HS-U71 VCR had two antenna inputs. Unfortunately, no new VCR I've found has the same feature. Have I overlooked a model, preferably S-VHS, that still has this useful feature? If not, is there any other way I can automate the selection of either signal source? I would hate to have to go back to using a mechanical A/B switch.

Steve Cruikshank
San Bernardino, California

A Sorry, but Mitsubishi was the last company to offer dual antenna inputs. The HS-U71 hasn't been available for two or three years, but if you're lucky, you might still find a Mitsubishi HS-U82 in stores. It's been discontinued, but a few

are still out there, often at pretty good prices. To my knowledge, this is the last machine to offer a dual antenna system.

One inexpensive alternative would be to purchase Radio Shack's \$40 A/B switch (catalog number 15-1957). It lets you choose between two RF inputs, and does so via a cordless remote control. You won't be able to program your VCR to select automatically the A or B input (the way you can with your VCR), but it's a more elegant solution than a clunky mechanical "piano key" switch.

Q When I plug an external video source like a camcorder into the audio/video input jacks on my Sony 8mm camcorder, I find I can no longer use the microphone jack. Is there a way around this problem?

R. Ramirez
Dallas, Texas

A The microphone input jack is only activated in camcorder mode. The built-in microphone normally has priority, but is overridden by an external microphone if you plug it into the external jack. However, all camcorder functions are disabled when you flip the switch from output to input, allowing you to record both external video (from another VCR, a laserdisc player, or a separate camera) and audio. The audio can be from a microphone, but it must be plugged into the audio input jacks (which can be stereo on camcorders that have stereo sound), not into the camcorder's microphone jack. You will need to use an outboard preamp or mixer to boost the mic's weak signal to line level, and if your setup is complex, you'll need a mixer to combine several audio sources into one.

If you own a camcorder that lacks headphone jacks, but has an audio output, you can monitor the audio through headphones, provided you use an adapter to convert the RCA phono jacks to the smaller miniplug. The audio is low, but listenable. ■

Video Magazine welcomes your questions. Address correspondence to Q & A, Video Magazine, 460 West 34 Street, New York, NY 10001.

Q Some friends of mine in Italy shot an 8mm video using a Sony camcorder and sent me a copy they dubbed onto VHS. To my dismay, I get super-slow audio and no video. Why this incompatibility and how can I get it converted? Would 8mm be a successful means of transatlantic communication?

Harry Sefton
Manhattan Beach, California

A Sounds like both the 8mm and VHS tape were recorded in the PAL format. Several companies can convert PAL video to NTSC. Check out the ads in the back pages of *Video Magazine*. Because of its small cassette and long running time, 8mm is an ideal format to exchange with friends overseas, but converting the tapes can get expensive. It would be easier if they sent you a PAL-format 8mm camcorder or VCR and you sent them an NTSC model. Many models are now available for less than \$500 at the discounted street price.

Multistandard 8mm players are also available, as are "global" format VHS decks, but they're more expensive solutions.

Q I just bought a Mitsubishi HS-U82 VCR which I'm very happy with. Now I want to begin editing tapes, and I don't know whether to buy another U82 or an edit controller, or which edit controller to get. If I buy a VCR, should I buy another brand to use with my U82?

Harrison D. Gaines Jr.
Oakland, California

A Selecting the right gear for video editing is a complicated prospect. Assuming you intend to edit camcorder tapes, one fact you don't disclose in your letter is whether that format will be S-VHS or Hi8. If it's S-VHS, then purchasing another S-VHS deck makes sense. On the other hand, if you already have a Hi8 camcorder, then you're all set, since you can use it as the player and the U82 as the recorder. (You could use an S-VHS camcorder for playback, but unless it's a Panasonic AG-series model, you can't find an edit controller that will work with it. If your S-VHS camcorder is a Mitsubishi, it will work in a synchro edit setup with the U82.)

Mitsubishi VCRs support a synchro edit feature that allows you to intercon-

nect any two of more recent decks to obtain highly accurate edits. But each edit must be done separately.

Several companies — Videonics, Future Video and Hama among them — make outboard edit controllers that can enhance the editing capability of VCRs.

Q I'm trying to find out the difference between the Sony CCD-V5000 and CCD-V6000 camcorders, and why the V6000 is not marketed by Sony in the U.S.

Tom Carter
Louisville Colorado

A Both the V5000 and V6000 are now discontinued. In the U.S., the V5000 has been superseded by the VX3. The VX3 offers RC time code capability, which the V5000 did not. The V6000 was only sold in a PAL configuration, and did offer RC time code. It appeared as an interim model a year or so ago, before the VX3 was announced. At the time, I asked a Sony spokesman if the company had any plans to introduce a comparable NTSC model. The answer was no, and the subsequent introduction of the VX3 seems to confirm why. ■

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Circle 5 on Reader Service Card.

COMDEX hails the latest in desktop video and CD-ROM

Desktop video has always promised to give the average Joe the power to edit professional-quality videos, in the same way desktop publishing gave us the power to be our own graphic artists. It has yet to fulfill that promise, but that's about to change. At the fall COMDEX show in Las Vegas—the nation's largest convention and the yearly event for the computer crowd—desktop video was everywhere, with scores of manufacturers demonstrating new hardware and software that may finally put video on everyone's desktop, right next to the laser printer and fax machine.

The technology that's turning desktop video from a mix-'n-match mish-mash of applications into a streamlined, simplified editing system is compressed video file formats. (For a thorough discussion of the basics of these formats, see last month's "Camcorner".) These file formats make real cut-and-paste editing possible. Just digitize the video and audio you want, divide it into scenes and combine it on a graphic time-line—no VCRs, editing controllers or video mixers required.

Because COMDEX is a PC-centric show with only token attendance from Macintosh developers, the attention in desktop video centered on Microsoft's *Video for Windows* format, as opposed to Apple's *QuickTime*. Microsoft devoted a big portion of its big booth to VFW, and many third-party developers showed up to show off new VFW applications.

For now, VFW is still at a crude stage—it can play digitized video in a 160x120-pixel window. But Microsoft previewed an upcoming version that offers 320x240 resolution (same as

MPEG). This might be acceptable for producing VHS-quality videos. It will probably take another year or two for Microsoft to achieve S-VHS quality with VFW.

IBM is entering the desktop fray with its own compressed video format, called *Video IN*. It uses IBM's proprietary Ultimotion algorithm to capture and play back 320x240-pixel images at 30 frames per second. Right now, *Video IN* exists only as a developer's kit, but you can expect to see it written into a variety of OS/2 applications soon.

One of the hottest upcoming applications for compressed video file formats is animation rendering, the process of using computer graphics to make on-

editing software as Adobe *Premiere*.

To convert your camcorder tapes into VFW, *QuickTime* or *Video IN* files, you need a capture board, a card that fits into your PC and offers S-video and composite video inputs. Capture board manufacturers are springing up right and left—COMDEX hosted dozens of them. This expansion of the field should ensure lower prices, better products and (probably) the eventual success of desktop video.

The hot name right now in video capture is Indeo, a technology from Intel. The buzz at COMDEX was that Indeo is the current leader in the field, and most desktop video software developers are optimizing their programs to work

with video digitized on an Indeo card. Another name to watch is Creative Labs, the company that almost single-handedly created the audio board market with its Sound Blaster, and hopes to do the same with its Video Blaster capture board.

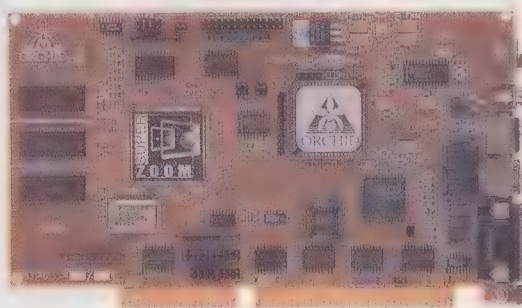
The first VFW product we've seen that could actually be used for editing real, full-frame NTSC video is Orchid's *Vidiola Pro*. This board uses a new chip from Auravision, which allows 15 fps capture at 320x240, and 30-fps capture at 160x120. Using a

line-interpolation scheme, the *Vidiola Pro* blows up a 160x120 window to full-screen, 640x480 video (a feature Orchid calls *Super Zoom*). This results in an image of approximately VHS quality. The *Vidiola Pro* also offers NTSC output and live video overlay.

Orchid offers the *Vidiola Pro* in two packages: Pro/C and Pro/D. Pro/C (\$599) is intended for those who want to do tape-based editing, using the



The Vanguard from Vegas: Advanced Digital Systems' Game Blaster VGA-to-NTSC convertor (above), Knowledge Adventure's outstanding *Dinosaur Adventure 3D* CD-ROM (above right) and Orchid's *Vidiola Pro* NTSC input/output board (right).



screen objects move. Currently, rendering anything but crude animations usually requires a professional VCR with single-frame recording capability, and the least expensive of those is a \$2,000 Sanyo S-VHS model. Now, Gryphon's *Morph* (a dedicated morphing program) and Caligari's *trueSpace* (a 3-D modeling and animation package) can render straight into VFW files, which can then be cut into other video files using such

board's overlay capability to add titles, graphics and animation. It's bundled with Gold Disk's *Video Director* (which offers LANC and infrared control of VCRs and camcorders) and *Animation Works*, a titling and animation package. Pro/D (\$699) is for those who want to digitize their videos and edit in the computer—it comes with Adobe *Premiere*, North Coast Software *PhotoMorph* and *Asymetrix Compel*, a presentation authoring program.

Of course, if you're going to edit a video on your computer, you need a way to get it back onto videotape. Fortunately, devices that convert VGA graphics to NTSC are now plentiful. These convertors are becoming quite inexpensive—Advanced Digital Systems offers a pocket-sized model called the Game Blaster that comes packaged with three computer games for a street price of about \$129.

With all the noise made by CD-I, 3DO and other dedicated interactive disc players, few people have noticed that computer-based CD-ROM has become a mainstream format, with about 3 million players currently in use in the U.S. (The number is expected to double within a year.) COMDEX saw the introduction of new titles with impressive video snippets, like Knowledge Adventure's educational disc *Dinosaur Adventure 3D*, in which a Tyrannosaurus Rex runs straight at (and over) you to a pounding synthesized beat. And everyone at the show seemed surprised to find numerous adult CD-ROM displays, all promising a titillating interactive experience. One software developer speculated that these risque discs might even inspire a new generation of peripherals designed to help users interact more fully with the programs. (That's as descriptive as I'll get.)

Although all of these products are interesting, they still pale in comparison with real video. Here's hoping that by the time of the next COMDEX, PC-based digital video will be good enough for serious video editors. Given the progress developers have made in the one year since VFW was introduced, there's a good chance it'll happen. ■

HANDS-ON

continued from page 16

("I may not be the world's greatest singer, but I'm not the dumbest.") and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* ("When we arrive at Vulcan, I will take these pieces to a secure holding area before going on to the sanctuary.")

The output continued without a blip. I was fascinated, and amused by the

frequent typos in live talk shows as the captioning stenographers raced to keep up. The capital of Russia came out as "Moss Cow." An "outlawed" Irish paramilitary group emerged as "out loud." By contrast, captions for recorded shows tended to be textbook-clean.

All this babble still rests in my computer as a file in the Capwrite directory, to be read at leisure, printed again, or incorporated into other programs. Although it may be an awkward arrangement for some home entertainment centers, running the Caption Writer through a computer enhances its usefulness. You can read TV text before printing to save paper, reformat the text to make it more readable or search through a program using key words. Reading a program's content is also a faster way to skim through a show than sitting through tape playback. If you're involved in education or monitoring the media, the Caption Writer can be a valuable resource.

It's said TVs of the future will be part computer and allow viewers the freedom to print all types of data, from stock quotations and airline schedules to cents-off coupons. One little piece of that future is already up and running. ■



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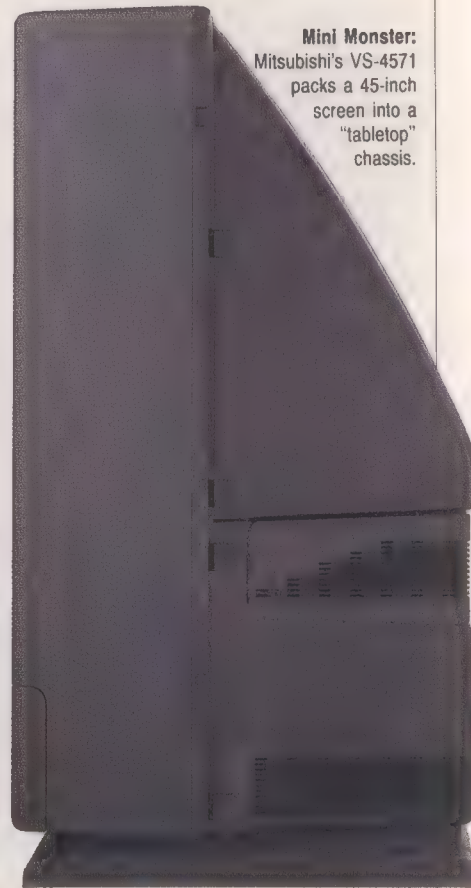
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Circle 7 on Reader Service Card.

VIDEOTESTS



Mini Monster:
Mitsubishi's VS-4571
packs a 45-inch
screen into a
"tabletop"
chassis.



MITSUBISHI 45-inch rear-pro- jectionTV

Billed as a tabletop rear projection TV set, Mitsubishi's VS-4571 is a 45-inch screen atop a pedestal only 10 inches high. This configuration (also seen in a new model in Sony's professional line) makes the set perfect for certain applications. It should sit atop a low table, like a coffee table, which with a typical seating arrangement would put your eyes about dead center vertically. It would also work beautifully in an in-wall installation because it would take up less room than a conventional set.

However, it doesn't work well on the floor, because unless you sit very low,

Mitsubishi VS-4571 45-Inch Rear- Projection TV



Price: \$3,299

Weight & Size (h/w/d):
130 lbs.; 39-1/8 x
38-7/8 x 20-1/2 inches

Screen Size: 45 inches
diagonal

Speakers: two 5-inch

**Broadcast Tuning
Range:**
2 to 13, 14 to 69

Cable Tuning Range:
125 channels—2 to 13,
A to I, J to W

Jacks: front—S-video/
video/stereo audio in-
put; rear—2 S-video/
video/stereo audio in-
puts, 2 RF inputs,
center-channel line in-
put, S-video/video/
stereo audio tuner out-
put, S-video/video/
stereo audio monitor
output, subwoofer out-

put, active A/V network,
stereo external speaker
outputs

Audio Amp Power: 20
watts/channel

Special Features: PIP,
center-channel input,
switchable video noise
reduction, matrix sur-
round sound, power
restore

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution:
750 lines

Picture S/N (dB): video
51.8, chroma AM 62.7,
chroma PM 62.9

Screen Brightness:
159 footlamberts

Color Temperature:
5,500-8,350 Kelvin

Accuracy of Colors:

very good

**Audio Frequency Re-
sponse:** line out—40
Hz-7 kHz, +/-3 dB; -8.4
dB at 20 Hz, -7.42 dB
at 20 kHz; speaker
out—40 Hz-8 kHz, +/-3
dB, -6.9 dB at 20 Hz,
+5.9 dB at 20 kHz

Audio S/N: line 72.1
dB, speaker 53.7 dB

**Total Harmonic Distor-
tion:** line 0.1%,
speaker 0.7%

RATINGS

Picture:
very good/excellent

Audio: good/very good

Ease of Use:
very good

Overall: very good

HIGHLIGHTS

Mitsubishi's VS-4571 is the first tabletop rear-projection TV. It will probably work well only on a low coffee table or built into a wall—its imposing size makes it too big for most tables, and it's too low to leave on the floor. It features picture-in-picture (with only a single tuner), a wide range of color temperature and bias modes, and an input for using the set's speakers as the center speaker in a Dolby Pro-Logic sound system. It accurately reproduces colors, especially fleshtones, and displays a picture with impressive depth and detail. We rate picture quality very good to excellent, audio quality good to very good, and overall performance very good. At \$3,299, it's a good value, especially because it has no competitors.

your eyes will be well above the center of the picture, and the picture brightness will diminish. It also won't work well with most A/V system furniture, because it's so much larger than the direct-view TVs for which such cabinetry is usually designed.

The set is equipped with picture-in-picture, but because there is only a single tuner, you'll have to hook up a VCR and use its tuner along with the VS-4571's if you want to watch two TV shows at once. The set doesn't have surround sound, but it does offer a sound expansion mode that produces a bigger sound using only the set's stereo speakers. You can also hook up external speakers.

A line-level input lets you connect the center-channel output of a Pro-Logic decoder or receiver, so the VS-4571's speakers serve as the center channel in your system. (The problem is that their sound probably won't match that of your main speakers, and sounds that move across the screen will change as they jump from speaker to speaker.)

The set has a jack for Mitsubishi's Active A/V Network, which relays infrared remote commands to other Mitsubishi components. If you have a Mitsubishi VCR with A/V Network, you gain access to several unique functions.

continued on page 30

VIDEOTEST
718

MAGNAVOX VHS-C Camcorder

The EasyCam CVR630 is Magnavox's top-of-the-line VHS-C camcorder. It's as feature-packed a camcorder as you can find, with enough editing features to produce a pretty slick production entirely in-camera.

Leading the feature list are a variety of digital effects, including still, strobe and mirror. The camera can fade to black or white, and can wipe to a diamond or a box pattern with soft or sharp edges, to a diamond with a mosaic pattern, to a box with a striped pattern and to a random pixel wipe. There are also digital zoom in 2x (for total magnification up to 20x) and 10x (magnification to 100x) modes. Because the digital zoom does not increase detail, it looks pixelated at magnifications beyond about 16x.

The camcorder has video dub (for replacing the picture while keeping the sound) and audio dub (for replacing the sound without affecting the picture). A small video light clips into a powered shoe on the right side of the lens. It helps improve color for close-up shots in low light, but cuts battery life.

The CVR630 also has electronic image stabilization, which helps eliminate the shakiness inherent in hand-held shooting. Because Magnavox did not increase the pixel count of the sensor to compensate for the deleterious effects of the stabilizer, the stabilizer cuts resolution slightly, but it works

Don't Fear the Dark:
Magnavox's CVR630 includes a snap-on video light.

HIGHLIGHTS

The Magnavox EasyCam CVR630 is a feature-packed, affordable VHS-C camcorder. It offers eight shutter speeds plus a host of editing features, including video dub, audio dub and many digital effects, including zoom, strobe, mirror and fancy fades and wipes. An unusual viewfinder rotates to the side for easier shooting. It also has a snap-on video light and an electronic image stabilizer. However, there's no live input for recording directly from other video sources. Picture quality is average, audio quality is fair and overall performance is average. This \$1,100 camcorder is a good buy if you want lots of bells and whistles.



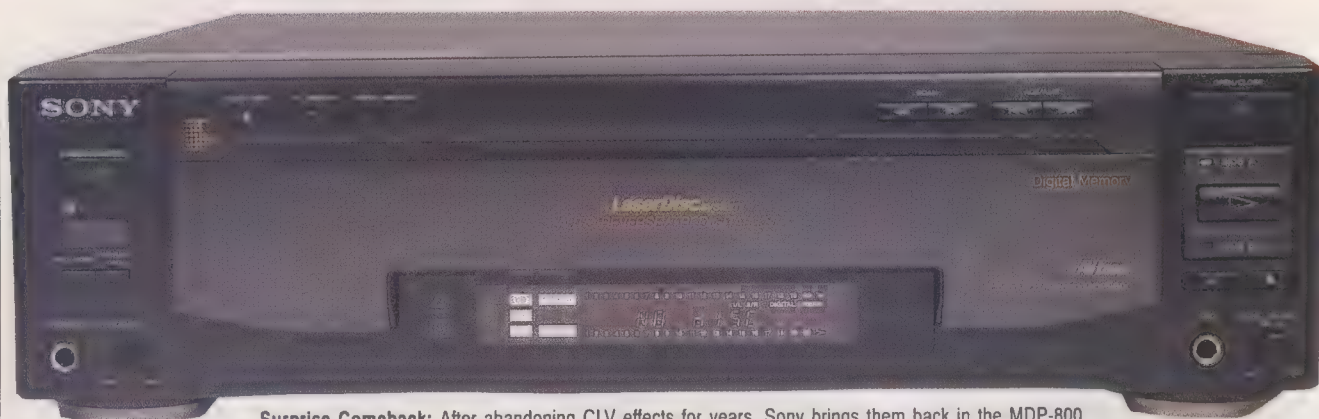
pretty well. (For a more thorough evaluation, see the "Videotest" of the Canon E700 in this issue.)

Many of the other features are also attractive and very useful, like the edit search feature that uses the zoom rocker to seek edit points if the record lock switch is on. The camcorder offers eight shutter speeds from 1/60- to 1/10,000-second, plus an auto high-speed shutter mode that sets the speed to 1/100-second as long as there is enough light to support that speed. The backlight control is unusual in that it offers three levels of compensation. In a way, it is like a manual iris that offers three options for larger lens openings—this allows much more accurate settings than most back-

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VIDEOTESTS



Surprise Comeback: After abandoning CLV effects for years, Sony brings them back in the MDP-800.

VIDEOTEST
719

SONY
*combi
player*

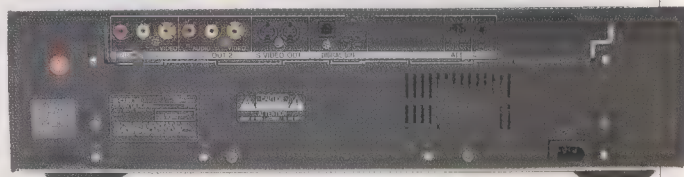
pany's first player in years with digital effects.

Digital effects let you get still frames, frame-by-frame advance, slow motion, flash motion (strobe), speed play, still picture with sound and clear visible

Sony has always made pretty good combi players, so we've been disappointed that the company has never produced a high-end model with digital effects and automatic side-changing. The MDP-800 fills this gap in Sony's line—it's the com-

pany's first player in years with digital effects. Digital effects let you get still frames, frame-by-frame advance, slow motion, flash motion (strobe), speed play, still picture with sound and clear visible scanning from CLV discs. (CLVs comprise the vast majority of today's laserdiscs.) This circuitry is very important to many laserphiles, because without it, a laserdisc player offers less versatility in playback than a \$200 VCR.

Otherwise, the MDP-800 has all the features you could want in a combi player. Its automatic side-changing feature lets you watch most movies in their entirety without having to get up from your chair. And at 11 seconds per side change, it's very quick. The player's other interesting features include a karaoke microphone input and picture call, which lets you memorize a still frame



HIGHLIGHTS

The MDP-800 is the first Sony laserdisc player in years to offer digital effects—still, slow-motion, speed play and scan—for CLV discs. It has one unusual feature—a karaoke mic input with controls for level and echo, so you can sing along with CDs or karaoke laserdiscs. The player offers automatic side-changing, a jog/shuttle dial on the remote and a digital audio output. We rate the picture very good, the sound very good to excellent and overall performance of this \$1,199 combi player very good. We note that the picture contains some digital artifacts, and that the jog/shuttle dial has a bit of lag.

and recall it at the touch of a button.

A picture enhance button on the remote offers modes for sharp, standard and soft. The latter reduces screen noise for discs of old movies, but frankly, we don't see much use for it. The tray accepts all types of CDs (even the three-inch kind) and laserdiscs, and the player offers the same programming versatility found in good CD players.

The front panel has controls for side-changing and basic playback functions. It has a button for LD Quick Start, which shortens to nine seconds the time it takes to get a laserdisc playing. Another button shuts off the front-

Sony MDP-800 Combi Player



Price: \$1,199

Weight & Size (h/w/d): 22 lbs., 4-3/4 x 17 x 17 inches

Disc Formats: LD, CD, CD-Video

Rapid Search: chapter/track and frame/time—less than 10 secs. end-to-end on one side

Cue & Review Search: 10x and 30x

Side Change: 11 sec.

Program Start Locator/Index/Cue: chapter/track, time/frame, point A, program, random

Jacks: front—mic and

headphones, both 1/4-inch; rear—2 S-video/video/stereo audio outputs, Toslink optical digital audio output, Control S input

Special Features: digital CLV effects, digital memory bypass for CAV stills (from front panel only), auto side-changing, picture enhance, picture call, karaoke mic input with volume control and digital echo

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: 415 lines

S/N Ratios (dB): unweighted luminance 45.3, weighted luminance 52.7, unweighted

video 46.9, weighted video 52.8, chroma AM 44, chroma PM 39.3

Audio Frequency Response: digital 10 Hz-20 kHz, +0.52/-0.2; analog 20 Hz-20 kHz, +2.6/-2.9 dB

Dynamic Range: 98.2 dB

Audio S/N: digital 104 dB, analog 68.3

Audio Distortion: digital less than 0.003%, analog 0.017%

RATINGS

Picture: very good

Audio: very good/excellent

Overall: very good

panel display. At the left is a 1/4-inch headphone jack with a rotary level control. The still button on the front panel bypasses the digital memory when CAV discs are played, producing a high-quality still picture. (The remote's still button does not bypass the digital memory.)

The most unusual features are a mic input with level and echo controls for karaoke. The MDP-800 doesn't offer the fancy key changing and sound effects found on many karaoke machines, but for straight sing-along use, it works quite well. You'll need to supply a mic with a 1/4-inch plug, and although the mic lets you sing along with any disc, you get the best results with laserdiscs made for karaoke, which have music without vocals and videos with the words to the songs onscreen. (Don't scoff at this feature—it makes for great parties.)

The rear panel has two S-video/vidео/stereo outputs. It has a Control S input for accepting remote control commands relayed from another Sony component—this lets you hide the MDP-800 in a cabinet without sacrificing remote control capability. A switch attenuates the audio output level—it's intended to cut down the volume to

prevent distortion when using the karaoke function with TV speakers. There's also a Toslink optical digital audio output for feeding an outboard digital-to-analog convertor or a receiver equipped with Toslink input. (For more on Toslink, see this issue's "Home Theater" column.) There is no RF output—if your TV has no audio/video inputs, you must daisy-chain the MDP-800 through a VCR.

The remote control has a full set of playback controls with a 10-digit keypad. Its unusual controls include the picture call and picture enhance buttons noted above. It also has four controls for Sony TVs: channel, volume, power and input.

There's a jog/shuttle dial at the bottom of the remote. It lets you enter any of the player's forward and reverse speeds with a spin of the shuttle ring, and step forward or backward frame-by-frame with the jog dial. Unfortunately, the jog dial has a bit of lag—the picture doesn't step to the next frame for a second or so after you turn the dial. This lag can make finding a particular frame a bit cumbersome.

The manual has dedicated sections for LD, CD, CD-V and karaoke use plus a section on operations common to all

play modes. That organization, plus a complete index in the back, simplifies learning to use the player's many options.

The MDP-800 incorporates extensive digital circuitry, including a timebase corrector, a comb filter and a dropout compensator. These are intended to clean up the picture, and in some cases they do a great job—the digital comb filter effectively rids the picture of dot crawl and hanging dots if you use the S-video outputs. But as we've seen in many other players, the digital circuitry creates picture artifacts—a grainy, almost pixelated look. Almost all players with digital effects have this problem (except for Pioneer's super-expensive CLD-97 and LD-S2). But at least one of the MDP-800's competitors, Panasonic's LX-900, doesn't suffer these artifacts to as bothersome a degree.

The MDP-800 also exhibits noticeable color noise. The visible scan isn't as smooth as that of most other players with digital effects—it looks like the series of quick stills presented by the clear scan mode found on many less expensive players, but without the black frames inserted between picture stills.

continued on page 33



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VIDEOTESTS

VIDEOTEST
720

CANON 8mm camcorder

In our test of stabilization systems last year ("Curing the Video Jitters," Apr. '93), we found that the optical stabilization system jointly developed by Canon and Sony outperformed the electronic image stabilizers we tried. Until Canon's new E700 came along, though, optical stabilization was only available on Hi8 camcorders listing for \$1,800 or more. The E700 is an 8mm model with a list price of \$1,400.

The stabilizer uses Canon's Vari-Angle prism and motion sensors to compensate for the shake that is inevitable in hand-held shooting. Unlike electronic image stabilizers, it does not require a higher grade of image sensor to deliver the same resolution as non-stabilized cameras, and the image does not have the jittery pixel-movement artifacts often seen with electronic systems.

We compared the stabilizer with the electronic system used in Magnavox's CVR630, also tested in this issue. The two systems performed very differently. Both do a good job of steadying static shots, although the natural damping caused by the Canon's liquid-filled prism

makes its picture more stable; what shaking you can see is less abrupt. However, the Canon's stabilizer tends to "bounce" at the ends of pans and tilts—it stops and moves back slightly, while the Magnavox's stabilizer responds more naturally. We still prefer the optical stabilizer, but recommend you try both types in the store.

The E700 also incorporates a pop-up light, first seen on its virtual lookalike, the E520 ("Videotests," Sept. '93). A switch on the left side lets the light rise behind the microphone. The light comes on automatically when the E700



Shake Breaker:
The E700 offers optical image stabilization.

HIGHLIGHTS

Canon's E700 is the first 8mm camcorder to have an optical image stabilizer, the best stabilization system going. An integral light pops up from behind the microphone when you turn it on. The E700 also offers programmed auto exposure, two-speed zoom and Canon's Flexigrip for high- and low-angle shooting. We rate picture quality good, audio average to fair and overall performance good. At \$1,400, it's a bit high for 8mm, but its special features are worth the extra bucks.



Canon E-700 8mm Camcorder

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| | (6.1-73.2 mm), two-speed zoom with auto macro | 1/60- to 1/10,000-sec. | min. for 120-min. tape |
| | Filter Diameter: 46mm | White Balance: auto | Remote Pause: none |
| | Minimum Focusing Distance: 3/8-inch at wide-angle | Viewfinder: 0.6-inch black & white CRT | Audio: hi-fi AFM mono |
| | Autofocus: TTL | Microphone: mono electret condenser | Title: 2 lines of 16 characters each, plus date/time and age imprinting |
| Price: \$1,400 | Iris: auto plus programmed AE modes for BLC, spotlight, sand & snow | Jacks: video/audio in/out, DC out for RF converter | Special Features: optical image stabilizer, pop-up light, edit erase, flying erase head |
| Weight & Size (h/w/d): 2.2 lbs., 4-1/2 x 4-7/8 x 10-1/2 inches | Fader: hold-down type on camcorder, trigger-operated from remote | Tape Speed: SP only | RESULTS |
| Image Sensor: 1/3-inch CCD, 270,000 gross pixels | Shutter: auto with seven manually selected speeds from | Video Heads: 2 | Horizontal Resolution: 250 lines |
| Lens: f/1.8, 12x | | Cue & Review Search: 9x & 19x forward, 7x & 19x reverse | S/N Ratios (dB): un- |
| | | Fast Forward/Rewind Time: 6-1/4 min./7-1/4 | |

weighted video—43.8, weighted video—49.3, chroma AM—42.4, chroma PM—38.2

Minimum Illumination: 13.1 lux for 50 IRE units

Audio Frequency Response: 40 Hz-7 kHz, +0.1/-3 dB, -9.8 dB at 20 Hz, -7.8 dB at 20 kHz

Hi-Fi Dynamic Range:

64.1 dB

Audio Distortion: 0.3%

Approx. Battery Life: 68 min. no light, 25 min. with light (man. focus/no zoom)

RATINGS

Picture: good

Audio: average/fair

Overall: good

is in camera mode, and shuts off when you go to playback. It's not enough to light a dark room full of people, but for medium shots and close-ups of two or three subjects, it's fine. Using the light cuts battery life to about 25 minutes.

Also noteworthy is Canon's Flexigrip, which combines the handgrip, zoom, run/pause button, battery compartment and viewfinder in one swiveling unit. By swiveling the Flexigrip down, you can shoot with the E700 held overhead; swiveling it up lets you hold it down low, which is the perfect angle for videotaping small children. The sports-type viewfinder lets you get some idea of what you're shooting even with your eye a foot or two from the viewfinder, although you can't see the entire picture from a distance.

The E700's other interesting features include programmed auto exposure modes to compensate for backlit, spotlight and sand/snow shooting conditions; and a seven-speed shutter (up to 1/10,000-second) to deliver crisp shots of fast-moving action. There's no manual iris control, which would allow more precise adjustment of exposure than the programmed AE modes.

An edit erase feature returns the

tape to the start of a bad take if it is stopped within the first minute or so. This gives you the option of easy in-camera editing-out of unwanted interruptions, like someone walking in front of the camera or a car horn intruding on someone's speech.

The fader is unusual in that it's a hold-down type on the camcorder and trigger-operated on the remote. You can imprint date and time as you'd expect, and the camcorder also provides a single memory for age imprinting, as well as a two-line character titler with up to 16 characters in each line. The minus search button provides a review of the last few seconds of the previous take.

The control layout is typical for a larger 8mm camcorder, with camera controls on the left front and playback controls along the top. The image stabilizer and auto exposure switches are big and easy to hit, but the legends on the tiny switches ringing the rear of the camera bulge are very hard to read, making these buttons a bit difficult to distinguish. The knob for powered manual focus is on the lower right side, making it rather uncomfortable to use.

Most two-speed zooms rely on finger pressure to control speed, but the E700

uses a switch on the left side instead. Holding down the switch increases the zoom speed. This setup allows more precise control, but it's one extra button you have to find and push.

The remote control has no switch to disable it or prevent accidental operation, but all the buttons are in a depression which offers some protection. It includes buttons for playback control, plus a zoom rocker and a run/pause button for camera control.

The camcorder has jacks for video/mono audio output; a button on top converts them to inputs for recording from other video sources. There's also a DC output for use with an optional RF adapter, which lets you play tapes on TVs with no audio/video inputs. The E700 has no jacks for an external mic or headphones, so you can't do anything to improve the audio. Unlike most Sony 8mms, it has no LANC jack, so it can't be interfaced with editing controllers.

According to both lab measurements and our subjective impression, picture quality is good, about on a par with most competing 8mm camcorders. The color is realistic, with just-right saturation, and the detail is about as much as you can get with 8mm. The only visi-

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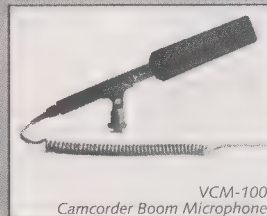
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ble picture problem is a trace of video noise, but it's not intrusive.

Although Canon rates the camera at 2 lux, it required 13.1 lux to produce a 50 IRE signal, our standard of measurement. However, at 2 lux you can still see about half the steps on a brightness chart. (Soon there will be an Electronics Industries Association standard for measuring low light sensitivity of camcorders that will make it easier for consumers to compare cameras based on lux ratings.)

The autofocus—a through-the-lens design, rather than the E520's infrared—isn't the fastest or stablest we've tried, but it doesn't present major problems, either. It hunts very slightly on low-contrast subjects. We think you'll find you can leave it on most of the time and get good results, and that's as much as you can ask from an autofocus.

The audio quality measures average to fair, which is a bit on the low side for an 8mm. The high frequencies roll off significantly above 7 kilohertz. For voices, it's fine—the mic sounds good and there's virtually no noise leakage from the transport, zoom and focus motors. For serious music video work, you might want something better, but in that case, you'd be crazy not to opt for a stereo camcorder.

We rate the E700 good overall. Its picture is competitive with most other 8mm camcorders (although the sound is a bit below par), and its optical image stabilizer and pop-up light will let you shoot good-looking video in situations where you'd leave most camcorders in the bag.

45-INCH TV

continued from page 25

Hitting the VCR's quick program key automatically turns on the TV and sets it to input one, so you can use the VCR's onscreen display. (It also turns off the TV when you're done programming.) Hitting the VCR's play button also turns on the TV. And hitting the TV's PIP button automatically turns on the VCR, so you can use its tuner.

The set's menu system commandeers the entire screen, and moves the TV picture into a window at the upper right of the screen. The menu unlocks a variety of useful features, like Super Quick View (which lets you quickly scan through up to 10 favorite channels), automatic closed captioning when you hit the mute button (what a great idea!), channel lock and automatic clock setting (via Television Data Services broadcasts). It also has a feature called power

restore, which lets you use a switched AC outlet to turn the VS-4571 on and off without losing its setup info and picture and sound settings.

The jack panel includes two S-video/video/stereo audio inputs and two matching outputs—one for the tuner, the other a loop-through of whatever source is displayed onscreen, with the loop-through audio level controlled by the TV remote. As mentioned above, there are jacks for center-channel input and A/V Network. There's also a subwoofer output jack, spring connectors for external stereo speakers, and two F-connectors for RF (antenna/cable) input. You can use these to watch an unscrambled cable channel while recording a scrambled one (or vice-versa), if you provide a signal splitter.

The front has a hidden compartment that contains an S-video/video/stereo audio input and buttons for the audio and video adjustment menus, timer reset, convergence test pattern and picture/sound reset. There are also exposed controls for channel, volume and input.

The remote, a design that Mitsubishi has used for a couple of years, is one of our favorites. A touch of a button on the side backlights the legends, so it's easy to use in the dark. It also controls two VCRs and a cable box. Although it's loaded with buttons, most are large and easy to hit, and their functions are simple to remember once you've used the set for a few hours. We especially like the dedicated buttons for accessing the audio and video adjustment menus. The manual explains most of the options in great depth, but it is more than 100 pages long and in some ways harder to go through than just pushing buttons to find out what they do.

We noticed only two problems that might be caused by cramming the tubes and optics into such a small package. First, the VS-4571 is a bit dimmer than many of today's rear-projection sets. If you take care to position the set so that your eyes are at the vertical center of the screen, it's plenty bright. But if you sit off-axis vertically, the brightness drops off substantially. Second, if you leave the contrast at the factory preset (all the way up), a "hot spot" develops—the center is noticeably brighter than the rest of the screen. However, with the contrast set correctly (about halfway up), we never noticed a hot spot.

In the past, we've found most Mitsubishi sets too bluish and grainy to suit our taste, but we're happy to report that the company seems to be tailoring its sets for a cleaner picture that's closer to

NTSC color standards—we noticed the trend first in the direct-view line, and now in the VS-4571. In fact, the color accuracy of the VS-4571 is remarkable, especially in the reds and flesh tones—the set accurately reproduces subtle shades of red, purple and orange, instead of blurring them into an oversaturated, indistinct mess as so many other television sets do.

The set offers three color temperature settings (low, middle and high) and three color bias settings (accurate, average and skin-tone). If you're the type who *must* jack around with these, feel free, but we suggest leaving the temperature set at middle and the bias set at accurate to get the most accurate color. The factory tint setting is way off—it needs to be shifted most of the way to red to get good color.

The notch filter eliminates horizontal dot crawl and lessens vertical dot crawl, without sacrificing much picture detail. The set also offers switchable video noise reduction, but using that feature screws up the brightness and contrast—we recommend leaving it in the off position.

Detail and depth were impressive for a rear-projection set, and we achieved respectable shadow detail without having to crank up the contrast or brightness. Many sets with PIP produce digital artifacts, including noise and slight pixelization, but we noticed none of that in the VS-4571. Overall, this is a very impressive showing, especially for such a radically new design—we rate picture quality very good to excellent.

Cutting down the cabinet size did affect the audio, though, because it gave Mitsubishi less room to install decent speakers. The set's five-inch drivers sound okay for sitcoms and news programs but, as always, we recommend using an external sound system (preferably with Pro-Logic surround) for movies and music videos. The frequency response measurements shown in the data box aren't a typo—the line level outputs roll off the high frequencies substantially, while the speaker terminals boost the high frequencies. Connecting a bright sounding speaker to these terminals could produce extremely fatiguing sound, while feeding a dull-sounding speaker through the line-level outputs (and an amp) could produce very muffled audio. Our audio rating is good to very good.

Overall, we rate the VS-4571 very good. Its configuration makes it ideal for certain situations where a rear-projection set would be difficult to accommodate, and its picture is competitive with (and in most cases, better than) other 45-inch sets on the market. ■

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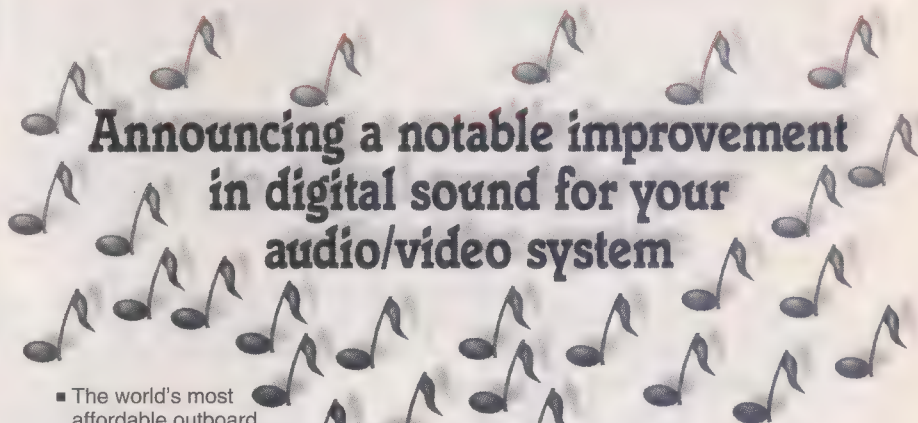
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VHS-C CAMCORDER

continued from page 25

light compensators, which only offer one setting.

Other useful features are synchro edit, which works with some Magnavox VCRs; indoor and outdoor manual white balance options; and automatic VHS index search marking that can be read by VCRs with that feature (although the camcorder cannot read them). However the camcorder can search for the end of recordings you have made so far. Among the features you may miss are a titler, recording from line input, an earphone jack, frame advance, slow motion, speed play and a supplied RF adapter.

The CVR630's viewfinder is unusual in that it is stored above the body but rotates to the side for shooting. It points straight up and almost straight down for easy low- and high-angle shooting. The tape eject button hides behind the viewfinder when it is in the normal shooting position, making the button difficult to access at times.

The camcorder has output jacks for video and mono audio, a remote jack for

synchro edit and a DC output for an RF converter. There's also an external mic jack, which lets you use wireless mics and other types of external mics for greater versatility and better sound.

As you would expect, most of the

camera adjustment controls are on the left side, and the playback controls sit on the top panel. Because the CVR630 is bigger than subcompacts, Magnavox could afford to make the controls a bit bigger too, thus making them easier to

Magnavox CVR630 VHS-C Camcorder

Price: \$1,100

Weight & Size (h/w/d):
1.9 lbs., 6-3/8 x 3-5/8 x
10-1/2 inches

Image Sensor: 1/3-inch
CCD, 270,000 gross
pixels

Lens: f/1.4, 10x (5.8-58
mm) zoom with auto
macro

Filter Diameter: 49mm

**Minimum Focusing
Distance:** 1.3 inches at
wide-angle

Autofocus: TTL

Iris: auto with BLC

Auto Fade/Wipe:
digital to/from black,
white, random, soft/

sharp/mosaic diamond,
soft/sharp/wipe box

Shutter Speeds: auto
with auto high-speed
option and eight manu-
ally selected speeds
from 1/60- to 1/10,000-
sec.

White Balance: auto/
indoor/outdoor

Viewfinder: 0.7-inch
black & white CRT

Microphone: mono
electret condenser

Jacks: video/audio out-
put, external mic input,
remote (synchro edit),
DC out for RF
converter

Tape Speeds: SP, EP

Video Heads: 4 (small
head drum)

Cue & Review Search:

approx. 3x SP, 9x EP

**Fast Forward/Rewind
Time:** 4-1/2 min. for
20-min. tape

Remote Pause:
synchro edit

**Program Start Loca-
tor/Index/Cue:** index
mark but no read

Audio: linear mono

Special Features:
electronic image stabi-
lizer, still/strobe/mirror
effects, digital fade/
wipe, 2x/10x digital
zoom, synchro edit, au-
dio dub, video dub,
flying erase head

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution:
240 lines

S/N Ratios (dB): un-
weighted video—36.3

SP, 36 EP; weighted
video—43.2 SP, 43.1
EP; chroma AM—40.7
SP, 38 EP; chroma
PM—34.9 SP, 32.9 EP

Minimum Illumination:
2.8 lux for 50 IRE

**Audio Frequency
Response (-3 dB):** 180
Hz-4 kHz SP, 180 Hz-2
kHz EP

Linear Audio S/N:
43.3 dB

Audio Distortion: 0.9%

Approx. Battery Life:
70 min. with light, 87
min. no light (man.
focus/no zoom)

RATINGS

Picture: average

Audio: fair

Overall: average

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use. The buttons are varied in shape to make them easier to identify by feel. The lens has a ring for powered manual focus, which makes focusing natural and accurate.

The wireless remote control has a hold switch and buttons for playback control and camera run/pause and zoom. A switch on the camcorder viewfinder disables the remote. The remote is supplied with a clip that holds it on the shoulder strap or on your belt.

When it comes to picture quality, our lab measurements conflict slightly with our subjective evaluation, mainly because the camcorder has no line inputs, so there is no way to measure the recorder performance separately. Our measurements are based on tapes made through the camera and from playback of tapes made on other machines, and such measurements are always lower.

That said, the picture looks better than the average rating that it earned might suggest. There's not much detail, but there's also no significant visible noise, so the picture is quite pleasing—its errors are of omission, rather than commission. The color is somewhat muted, but that probably contributes to the clean picture. At 2.8 lux, our low-light sensitivity measurement is impressive. The many editing features and digital effects will let you jazz up the video even more.

By our -3 decibel measurement standard, the audio frequency response falls off quickly at both ends, but retains usable response down to 50 Hertz at both speeds, and up to 10 kilohertz at SP and 4 kHz at EP. There are no line inputs, so our measurements are made on signals recorded through the mic jack and from recordings made on other machines. The mic sounds good, although a slight amount of transport noise leaks in. You should only notice the noise when shooting in very quiet indoor surroundings. We rate the audio fair compared to other VHS camcorders.

The CVR630 earns only an average overall rating, but for those who want fancy production values without spending lots of money on editing gear, and who are attracted to the VHS-C format, it's a good choice. ■

COMBI PLAYER

continued from page 27

Thus, the exact frame you're looking for may fall between the frames shown. All these demerits bring the picture rating down to very good—it's just not up there with the best of the field.

The sound fares better. Our lab measurements indicate very good to excellent performance on laserdiscs, CDs

and CD-Videos. Many manufacturers throw lots of nearly meaningless technical terms at you when describing the digital audio gear, and Sony's no exception—it promotes the MDP-800 as having a high-density linear converter for lower distortion and a 45-bit digital filter with 8x oversampling. But you can't judge a combi player by a list of its circuitry enhancements—you have to listen, and when you do, the MDP-800 doesn't disappoint. Our comparisons with other combi players and CD players suggest that its sound quality is quite pleasing, about that of a good midpriced Japanese CD player. In all but the weakest systems, it should shine. It's clearly better than a budget player, but not as detailed and naturally sounding as an audiophile piece like the CLD-97 or a Rotel CD player.

Overall, we rate the MDP-800 very good. Although this may seem a bit high given some of our comments, many comparably priced or less-expensive players have earned higher overall "Vid-eotest" ratings because they offer higher picture quality. ■

HOME THEATER

continued from page 18

is in the bass, offering the deepest, most powerful low end digital has to offer. These state-of-the-art D/As offer digital sound at its best, and while a multithousand-dollar D/A might be considered ridiculous overkill for playing the soundtrack to *The Mighty Ducks*, there are those who live life at that rarefied height where the air is thin and the women are too, and ridiculous overkill is just another way of saying "I Love Me."

If you want a D/A that approaches the sound of the Thetas while priced a lot closer to the DAC-in-the-Box, Theta also offers a really great budget D/A, the \$599 Cobalt 307. The Cobalt features the same D/A chips as the \$2,000 DS Pro Basic II, and as befits a Theta, has the deepest and most powerful bass of any D/A I've heard under \$1,000. I have a Cobalt in my home theater rig, along with a DTI to convert my Pioneer laserdisc player's lone Toslink output to electrical. The sonic gains in transparency and sheer natural clarity over the sound of the player's audio outputs are dramatic, and well worth the money.

So do yourself a favor and take a tip from that guy reading the audiophile magazines at the other end of the magazine rack—add an audiophile D/A converter to your laserdisc player and hear what you've been missing from movie sound. ■

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DESIGNING THE FIRST HI-DEF DECK

In a matter of only a few years, all the video equipment we're currently using will seem as quaint as 78-rpm records. Why? Because HDTV looms over the world of video like Godzilla over Tokyo, ready to destroy everything in its path. But that's good news, because HDTV will be vastly superior to our current NTSC system.

As a broadcast system, HDTV is all but ready to go—the Grand Alliance (a consortium of manufacturers and laboratories working together on HDTV development) is putting the finishing touches on the HDTV system for the U.S. Manufacturers are already warming up for the HDTV era—witness the new crop of 16:9 TVs.

For TV watchers, that's all well and good. But what about us video enthusiasts, who prefer to watch what we want, when we want? We'll need something to timeshift shows, play prerecorded software and edit our camcorder videos. And until recordable videodisc technology is available, the only machine that can perform these tasks is a VCR.

Although you probably haven't heard much about it, many companies are now working to define the standards that will dictate the way you record and play HDTV videos. In many ways, these machines won't be too different from the decks we use now—after all, VCRs will probably always need a play button. But other things *will* change.

We've recently been asking video engineers how our next VCRs will work, what features they'll include, how much they'll cost, and every other question we

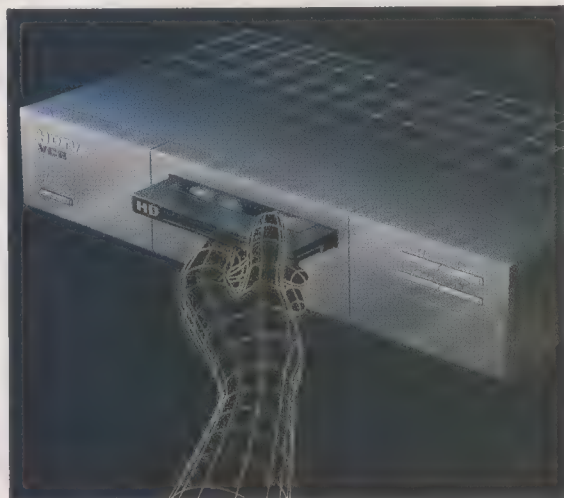
HDTV VCRs will revolutionize home video. Here's what they'll do and how they'll work.

can think of. So far, we've received very few answers, because in many cases the engineers simply don't know. In fact, they're asking themselves these questions right now.

Rather than wait a few years and let the engineers surprise us, we decided to tackle the questions on our own, examining each aspect of the VCR, using what information is currently available, and coming to logical conclusions about what we can expect from the next generation of VCRs. In effect, we designed our own HDTV VCR. Of course, with at least a year to go before we see anything close to a working prototype, some of these predictions may embarrass us later, but we'll take that risk.

We did have one solid source to rely on as the basis of our VCR design—the HD Digital VCR Conference, a group of 46 major manufacturers dedicated to setting a standard for HDTV VCRs. The Conference is working on the specs for SD and HD VCRs. The SD VCR will record at a data rate of 25 megabits per second. It will be used for digital recording of NTSC, PAL, SECAM and the Grand Alliance HDTV format. The standards for the Japanese version of this deck have been pretty well firmed up; the U.S. version should be quite similar.

The HD VCR will record at 50 megabits per second. It's intended for recording Japan's MUSE HDTV satellite broadcasts, which have a much higher bandwidth than the Grand Alliance format. Unlike SD decks, HD decks may use four heads. Although the MUSE signal is analog, HD decks will record it



Inside The HDTV VCR

Some degree of NTSC compatibility will probably be necessary for HDTV VCRs, so they'll incorporate extensive digital processing circuitry, including digital compression and decompression, analog-to-digital and digital-to-analog converters, and circuitry for reformatting the digital HDTV broadcast signal.

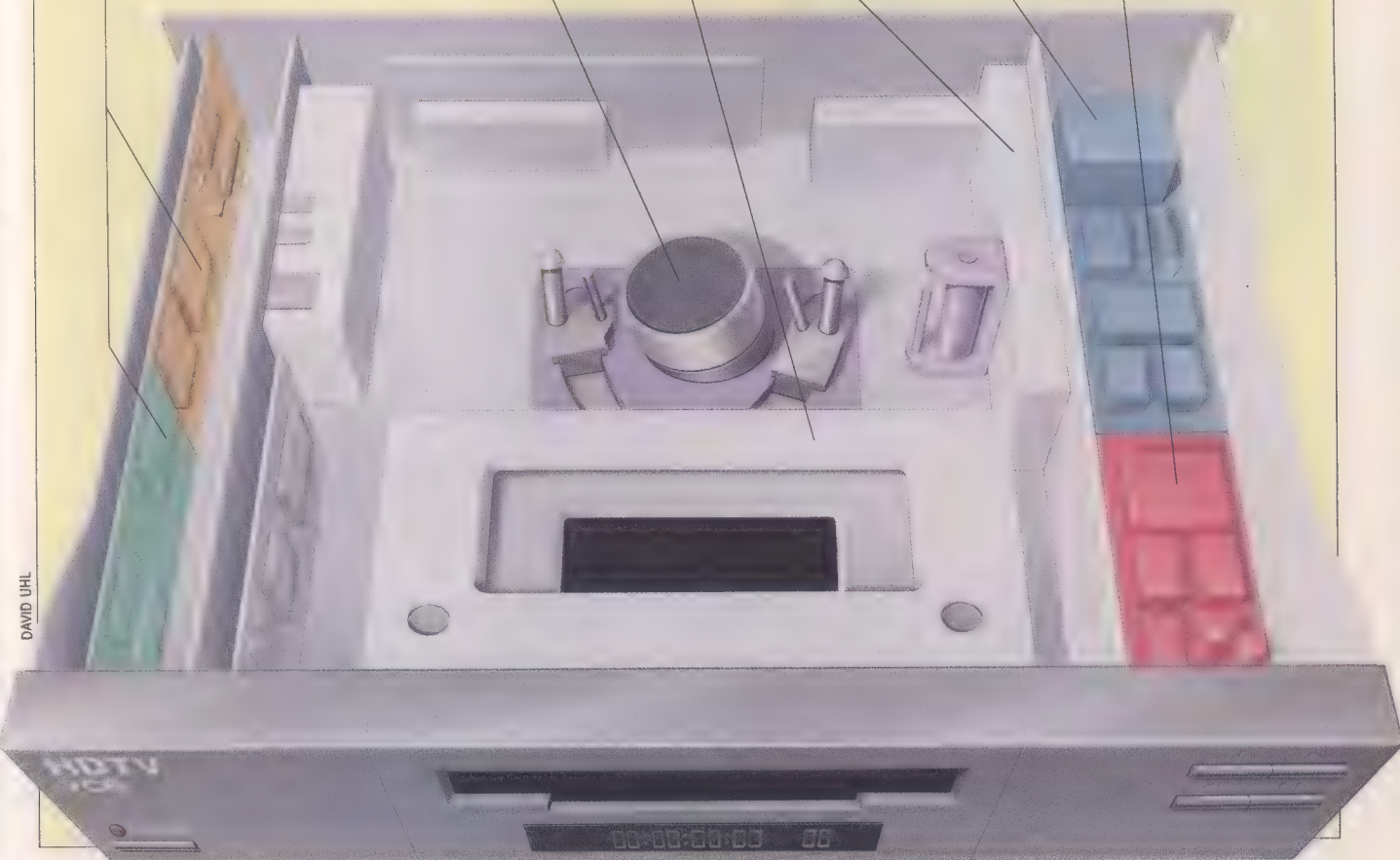
The transport is likely to resemble the 8mm tape transports of today. Of course, the dimensions will change to accommodate the new tape, most parts becoming 10 to 25 percent smaller than those in 8mm transports. Like 8mm machines, HDTV VCRs will rely solely on helical-scan recording (using a rotating head drum), with no linear heads for erasing or audio and control track recording—just a head drum, a couple of tape guides and a capstan and pinch roller.

The deck will accommodate two tape sizes, a full-size tape and a smaller one for camcorders. Don't compare this to VHS and VHS-C, though, because the small HDTV tape will play in a VCR without an adapter—just push it in. As with 3/4-inch U-matic VCRs, a slight indentation for the smaller tape will help guide it into position. The spindles that turn the tape hubs will move closer together to accommodate the smaller tape.

The HDTV VCR will still have modulators and demodulators for RF (radio-frequency, or cable/antenna) output and input. The RF inputs and outputs will work fine as both digital and analog inputs and outputs.

Because HDTV VCRs will record digital audio, they'll probably have digital audio inputs and outputs, so you can make direct digital recordings from a CD or laserdisc player, and feed the digital output into a Dolby Surround Digital decoder. It's possible that the VCRs will have integral Surround Digital decoders, but unlikely.

With 500-channel TV due in the mid-'90s, HDTV VCRs may need circuitry to accept onscreen programming services like StarSight or TV Guide On Screen. These guides will show you what's on and what's coming up, and they'll also let you mark shows you want to record, so you won't have to enter codes.



HI-DEF DECK



HDTV tapes will come in two types, both shown here at actual size. The large tape will probably record about two hours of HDTV and 4-1/2 hours of NTSC. The smaller one, intended for camcorders, will record one hour of NTSC and 30 minutes of HDTV. Both will use 6.35mm metal-evaporated tape.

digitally. They should be compatible, so that HD decks will play SD tapes.

It's worth noting that JVC is now selling an HDTV VCR in Japan using its new W-VHS format, a hi-def version of S-VHS. W-VHS decks will record analog HDTV signals, and they'll also play and record VHS and S-VHS tapes. We doubt W-VHS will have any effect on the U.S. market, though—with a fully digital system on the way, why futz with old-fashioned analog technology?

To start, let's answer the first questions everyone seems to ask: when and how much? Neither can be answered precisely; both are subject to the vagaries of technology development. But it's a fair guess that the Atlanta Summer Olympics in '96 will host the official rollout of HDTV broadcasting, and that HDTV monitors and VCRs will hit the market at about the same time.

Price, however, is anyone's guess,

and any introductory prices are really meaningless because they're sure to fall rapidly over the first five years or so. So what's our guess? Based on the design we present here, we think the first decks might hit the market for a street price of about \$3,000. However, as manufacturers combine the functions of several circuit boards onto single VLSI (Very Large-Scale Integration) chips, we guess that within a few years, street prices might fall to a level just above today's S-VHS decks—about \$800 plus adjustment for inflation. Manufacturers may eventually be able to reach commodity price points (maybe \$400 plus inflation), but it'll take many years—they've got a big R&D investment to pay off!

Before we discuss the HDTV VCR, we have to examine what's going into it—namely, the tape. Fortunately, we have a pretty good idea of what the tape will be like, because the Japanese stand-

ard has already been set and the Conference seems reluctant to change it for the U.S. So the likelihood is that the tape we describe here will be the one you buy in a few years.

The tape shells will come in two sizes, a full-size version about three inches by five, and a three-by-two-inch tape for camcorders. Both shells will hold metal evaporated tape measuring 6.35mm wide and seven micrometers thick.

By the Japanese standard, recording time for NTSC is 4-1/2 hours on the large cassette, 30 minutes on the smaller cassette. For HDTV recording, the tape speed will double, so figure a little more than two hours on the large cassette and one hour on the small one. We'll guess that manufacturers will try to lengthen this a bit for the U.S. market—a too-short recording time could hinder the HDTV VCR's success, despite its great picture. It happened to Beta; it could happen again.

The recording method will be digital for both HDTV and NTSC signals, using compression. The VCR will need extensive digital circuitry for analog-to-digital and digital-to-analog conversion of NTSC signals, and for reformatting of the digitally compressed HDTV broadcast signal.

One of the keys to this reformatting will be "trick play" tracks that permit visible search. Because of the way digital video is compressed, key frames (those that are only lightly compressed, often called intra or I frames) take up several tracks on the tape, and predicted or P frames (those that are heavily compressed) take up only a fraction of a track. In an analog NTSC VCR, speeding up the tape combines portions of several fields (remember, there's one field per track) into a single field, resulting in relatively clear scanning. But doing the same on a digital HDTV VCR would produce only bits and pieces of the key frame, and might miss a predicted frame altogether.

This effect can be avoided through use of a Hitachi scheme that records trick-play tracks, or low-resolution key

frames in the spaces where scanning will occur. This method only uses about five percent of the tape's data capacity, but unfortunately, a separate trick-play track is required for each scan speed and direction. Thus, HDTV VCRs will probably offer fewer scan speeds than high-end NTSC decks—and maybe no reverse scan at all.

The jack panel of an HDTV VCR

same as hooking up an NTSC VCR—run one cable from the wall to the VCR, and one from the VCR to the TV. (If engineers do come up with a new multipin connector designed just for HDTV, we hope it'll be sturdier than today's fragile S-video connectors.)

The deck will probably still have S-video and video inputs and outputs; the former for recording from NTSC

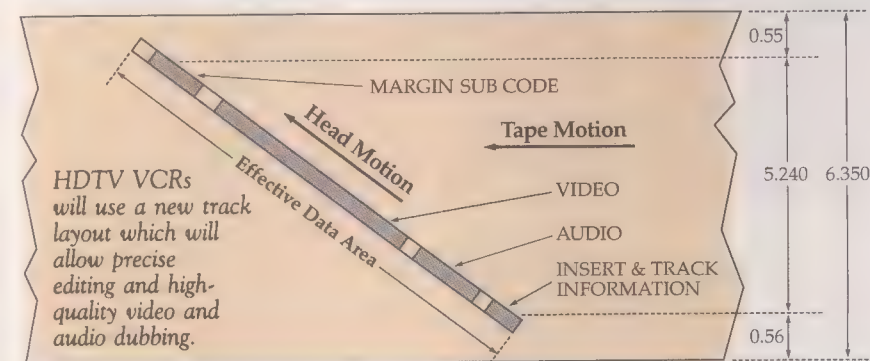
the digital output into a Dolby Surround Digital decoder.

It's unlikely that Dolby Surround Digital decoders will be built into VCRs, because doing so would limit system flexibility—if your decoder's built into your VCR, what are you going to use to play back those new Dolby Surround Digital laserdiscs coming down the pike? It would also add cost and four more jacks to the VCR. Some HDTV sets may do the decoding themselves, but we bet that most of the people who buy HDTVs still won't add surround sound.

The HDTV VCR will probably be able to play NTSC recordings on an NTSC TV, but it might not include down-conversion circuitry for displaying HDTV signals on an NTSC set. There will almost certainly be stand-alone HDTV-to-NTSC convertors for use with today's progressive-scan 16:9 TVs and data-grade video projectors, and manufacturers may wish to leave the down-conversion duties to such a decoder, rather than adding the feature to HDTV VCRs and increasing their already-high price.

The tape transport should look and work like today's 8mm transports. The dimensions and head drum diameter will have to change to accommodate the new tape, though. We'd guess that most parts will become 10 to 25 percent small-

continued on page 72



may not look much different from that of the deck you currently own. We fantasized about the possibility of a cool new connector for HDTV, then realized it's not needed at all, because digital HDTV is designed to retain full picture quality when transmitted in a six-megahertz NTSC channel. In theory, you should see no difference between an HDTV broadcast and a recording of that broadcast.

So the RF inputs and outputs you now use for cable and antenna hookup can stay—they'll serve perfectly well as digital inputs and outputs, and can be used to record HDTV and NTSC broadcast signals. (We can assume that for the first several years, HDTV VCRs will include analog tuners for recording NTSC broadcasts—the old system won't be going away anytime soon!) And for most people, connecting an HDTV VCR into the system will be exactly the

camcorders and VCRs, the latter for output to NTSC TVs. Stereo audio inputs and outputs will also be needed, because many people will choose to connect their HDTV VCRs to older stereo systems with no digital inputs. There's a good chance the deck will also have digital audio inputs and outputs, so you can make direct digital recordings from a CD or a laserdisc player, and feed

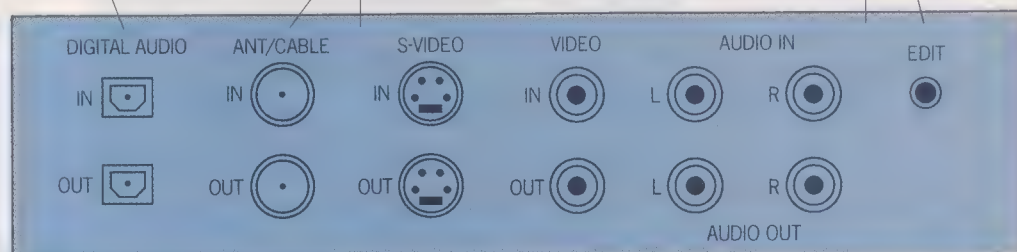
Digital audio input and output (probably the inexpensive Toslink type) will be used for interfacing with CD and laserdisc players, and Dolby Surround Digital decoders.

HDTV input and output jacks may be nothing more than humble F-connectors, which will carry modulated HDTV and NTSC signals.

S-video, video and stereo audio inputs and outputs will be needed for compatibility with NTSC products and analog audio gear.

An edit control interface, like the LANC jack currently found on some Sony decks, will let you hook any two (we hope) HDTV VCRs together for synchronized editing.

THE HDTV VCR'S REAR PANEL



The ABCs of DESKTOP EDITING

Desktop video—the marriage of computers and video—promises to revolutionize video production in the '90s the way computers transformed publishing in the '80s. As desktop publishing did, desktop video promises to empower the ordinary people with many of the same production capabilities that still typically require big bucks, trained technicians and a suite filled with fancy equipment.

But the precise definition of desktop video is a bit fuzzier than that of desktop publishing, because it's still evolving and because it embraces many different combinations of computer and video technologies. For now, desktop video refers to three basic applications:

- Videotape editing
- Special effects and graphics
- Digital video editing.

There are two other applications that incorporate elements of desktop video, but can't really be considered desktop video *per se*: interactive multimedia (like CD-ROM) and TV tuners for computers.

Obviously, it's easy to get confused about desktop video. In this article, we'll make it simple. We'll explain each type of desktop video application, describe the hardware and software you need to get into the field, and help you figure out which forms of desktop video you might be interested in.

VIDEOTAPE EDITING

Home video enthusiasts operating on modest budgets can grab a piece of the desktop video action at reasonable prices. Low-budget desktop video editing systems use traditional videotape editing techniques in which video is selectively copied from one

VCR or camcorder to another. In a computerized editing system, the computer acts as a controller to coordinate this transfer process. The computer creates an EDL (edit decision list) as you edit, reflecting the selected beginning and ending points for scenes you want to transfer in the sequence you choose. The most basic desktop video editing systems are called cuts-only systems. The computer does not touch the video signal—it acts purely as a controller.

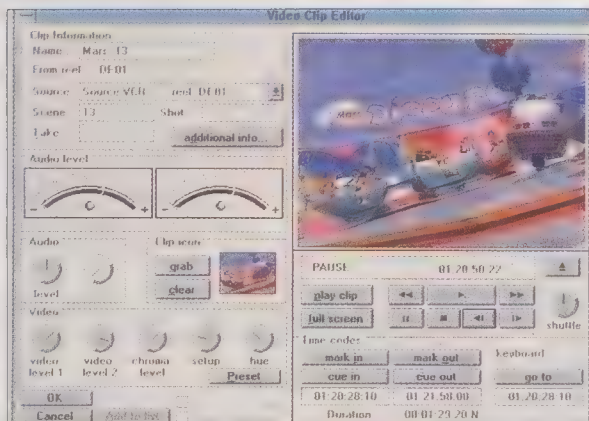
Depending on what sort of camcorder and VCR you own, getting started in this kind of system need not cost much. For example, if you've got

■ decent VCR and a Sony or Canon camcorder or VCR equipped with a LANC jack, you can get into desktop video for \$200—the cost of Gold Disk Video Director, available for Commodore Amigas and for PCs running Microsoft Windows.

Video Director includes two cables, one of which connects to a LANC jack, the other of which has an infrared emitter for controlling your VCR. The Video Director software lets you mark the starting and ending points of the scenes you want, then rearrange them on an onscreen EDL. Click an onscreen button, and Video Director will perform the edits for you. Abbate Video offers a similar product for the Macintosh, called Video Toolkit.

To get into this kind of desktop video, though, you must have the right kind of VCR or camcorder—at least one machine equipped with LANC or the five-

Dazed & confused about desktop video? Here's a complete primer.



Desktop Do-It-Alls: Versatile but expensive desktop video packages like Matrox's Personal Producer (top) and New Tek's Video Toaster 4000 (left) let a computer perform a wide variety of video editing and processing functions.

pin Control M jack found on low-end professional gear from Panasonic.

Sony also offers two VCRs, called Vdecks, designed specifically to be controlled by a computer—the Hi8 CVD-1000 and the 8mm CVD-500. The remote control jack is not LANC—it's a newer, more sophisticated interface called VISCA, which can be connected directly to any standard computer serial port. There's also a device called the CI-1000 Vbox, which converts VISCA to work with LANC-equipped machines.

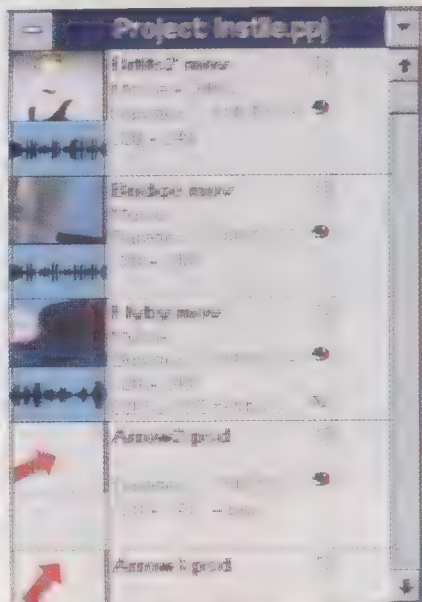
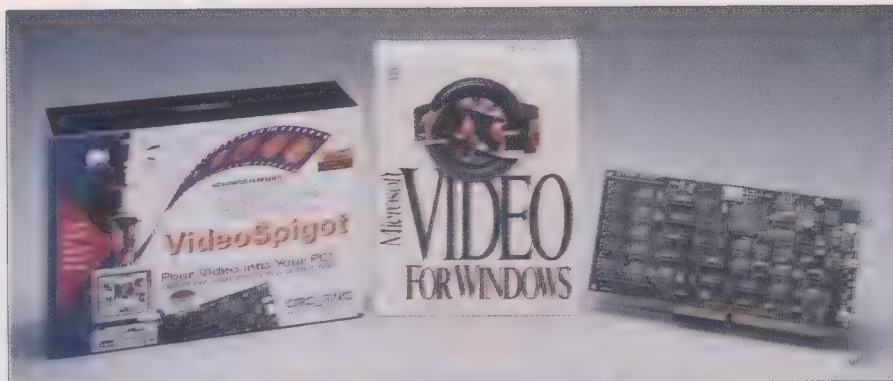
Most household VCRs don't have such sophisticated remote control jacks. Usually, they're limited to one-way infrared remote, or perhaps synchro edit jacks, which are not really usable for desktop video.

SPECIAL EFFECTS AND GRAPHICS

Some desktop video editing systems produce digital special effects by passing the video signal through an NTSC frame grabber board. Frame grabbing is the ability to create a video freeze frame, and convert it to a standard computer graphics file format. The frozen frame comes from a moving video image—click the mouse and it freezes. You can manipulate frozen frames for use in video graphics—as graphic elements, like the “flying logos” you see on commercials, or as textures or background for graphics you create with a paint or animation program. Some of these boards also offer NTSC output, so you can superimpose graphics and text over images from videotape.

Boards like the relatively inexpensive WatchIT! incorporate a tuner to grab frames from broadcast and cable TV. But most high-quality cards, like the Matrox Illuminator and Truevision Targa products, have video and S-video input jacks so you can hook up a camcorder to them.

The Video Toaster, a plug-in board



The Future of Editing: Products like Creative Labs Video Spigot capture board (top, packaged with Microsoft Video for Windows) and Adobe Premiere point to a future of all-digital video editing, where VCRs and edit controllers won't be needed.

for Amiga computers, is probably the most well-known video special effects board. (Actually, it's a hardware/software combination—one won't work without the other.) Not only does it grab frames, it can hold them in memory—a digital buffer—so they can be manipulated for a wide variety of special effects. It simulates a studio TV switching console, and can be used to provide a wide range of other transitions between two different source VCRs. In video jargon, this is called A/B roll editing. The Video Toaster is purely a transition device—

similar to an A/V image mixer—and has no inherent edit control capabilities. It also performs many graphics functions, which we'll describe below.

More comprehensive combination edit controller and digital video effects systems, such as the

Matrox Studio system (about \$9,995) and Fast Electronic's Video Machine (about \$4,000) can provide A/B-roll digital video effects and edit control—once you get all the scenes marked and in order, all you have to do is click an on-screen button, and the computer does everything for you.

Note that some of these A/B-roll machines require you to synchronize the incoming signals with timebase correctors (TBCs), such as the \$995 Personal TBC III from Digital Processing Systems—generally, you need one per input. Thus, the total tab for A/B-roll systems can run well over \$10,000 when you add up the VCRs, the editing controller, the TBCs, the special effects board and the software.

Most desktop video systems can also add titles, graphics and computer animation. The Video Toaster has all these capabilities built in—the Toaster software includes *Toaster CG*, a character generation system; *ToasterPaint*, for 2-D graphics creation and paintbox-style image manipulation; *LightWave 3-D*, for computer animation; and *ChromaFX*, for color filtering and effects. You can create your own images from scratch using *ToasterPaint* and *LightWave*, and you can add digitized images from videotape. You can also use artwork from third-party manufacturers, many of whom provide digital “clip art” for the Toaster.

Practically any IBM-compatible or Macintosh computer with an NTSC output board can convert titles and graphics created with standard desktop publishing software like Aldus *PageMaker* and Corel *Draw* for use with video productions. If you want to get fancier,

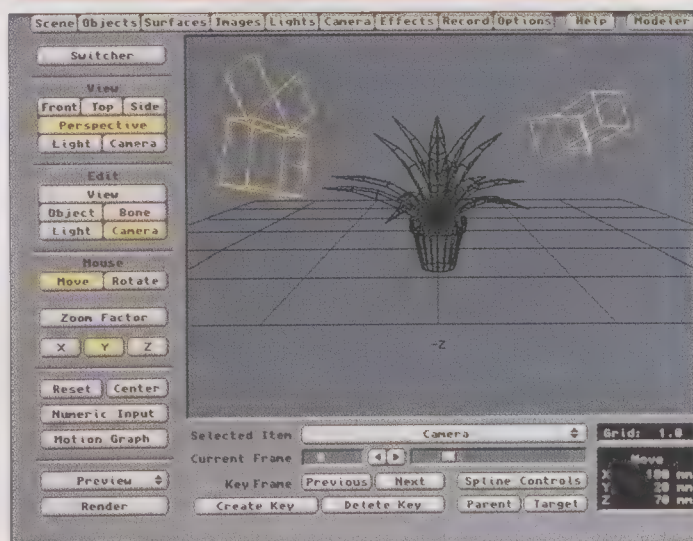
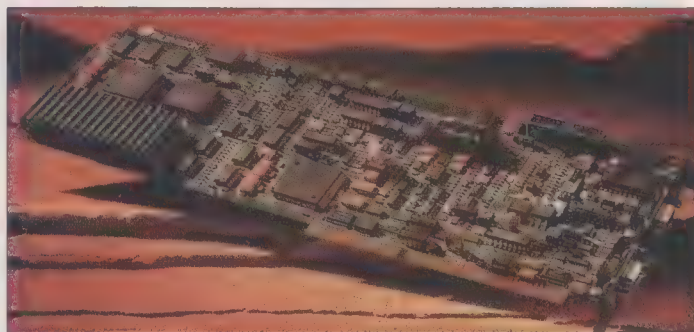
DESKTOP

programs like Gold Disk Animation Works Interactive and Autodesk Animator (both for the PC) will let you perform simple animations—which can really make your special effects special. Both of these programs only render 2-D graphics—you draw an object onscreen and tell the computer to twist it or move it up, down and back and forth.

More expensive packages offer 3-D animation, where you design objects in three views, then tell the computer to move the object, the camera (your view of the object) or the lighting. You can see 3-D animation in the TV show *seaQuest, DSV*—it's done on Video Toasters. This type of animation is much more impressive than 2-D, but it usually requires you to use a VCR with single-frame recording capability. That's because most computers can hold simple 2-D animation in memory as it's created, then play it back from memory so it can be recorded on any VCR.

But high-quality 3-D animation frames are usually so data-intensive that computers can hold only a few, and thus can't play back a 3-D animation from memory. To solve this problem, the computer is connected to the single-frame recording VCR, and when the computer finishes rendering each frame of the 3-D animation, it tells the VCR to record the frame, then starts on the next frame. Some products, like the new Video Toaster 4000, Autodesk 3-D Studio, and some Amiga software, can record lower-quality 3-D animations and play them back from memory.

Amiga computers are without question the best value for creating titles, graphics, paintbox effects and animations. They have NTSC output built in, and you can buy a genlock—a device that, like a Targa, overlays graphics and



Desktop Video Classics: Truevision's Targa (top), an NTSC input/output board and frame grabber, helped make video possible on the PC. *LightWave 3-D* (above), included with the Video Toaster, is practically the standard for 3-D animation.

titles on video—for less than \$200. Programs like Electronic Arts *Deluxe Paint IV AGA* (2-D graphics and animation) and Impulse *Imagine* (3-D graphics and animation) offer powerful graphics capabilities at a low cost. Another big advantage is that while Macs and IBMs require expensive video boards to create images with more than 256 colors, the newest Amigas can produce images with up to 256,000 colors right out of the box. This lets you produce graphics with realistic shading, and digitize video with little image degradation. (Even older Amigas produce images with up to 4,096 colors—a big step beyond basic PCs and Macs.)

DIGITAL VIDEO EDITING

Imagine coming home from a vaca-

tion with your camcorder, popping the videocassette into your computer, and having everything you shot temporarily transferred to the computer's hard disk. Now you can edit all the raw footage on the computer, instantly jumping from one portion of the material to another, with no wait for searching or rewinding. You can go from one shot to another with a host of sophisticated special effects, like page flips and squeeze zooms. Type in credits, press a few more buttons, pop in a blank tape and presto—the computer records the finished, edited sequence onto the new tape, complete with professional color bars, countdown, and picture and sound quality almost identical to the original recordings.

Sounds like a fantasy? It is for home video enthusiasts, for the time being. But pros have access to exactly this sort of technology, in the form of nonlinear editing systems. Macintosh-based products made by Avid are the best-known in this category, but they start at around \$10,000—\$40,000 if you want broadcast quality.

You can get into digital video editing affordably using compressed digital video file formats, like Apple *QuickTime* and Microsoft *Video for Windows*, but you'll sacrifice quality in the process. The picture quality of digital video tends to be comparatively crude—right now, it's usually at 160x120-pixel resolution, at only 15 frames per second—because most of today's personal computers are simply not fast enough to process the rapid stream of full-motion, full-screen video data, which requires 640x480-pixel resolution at 30 frames per second.

The closest you can come right now to broadcast-quality digital video editing using these file formats is to use Adobe *Premiere 3.0* (a digital video editing pro-

continued on page 50



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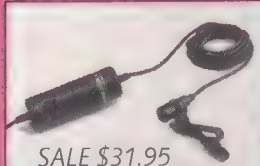
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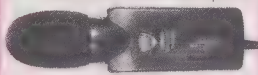


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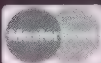
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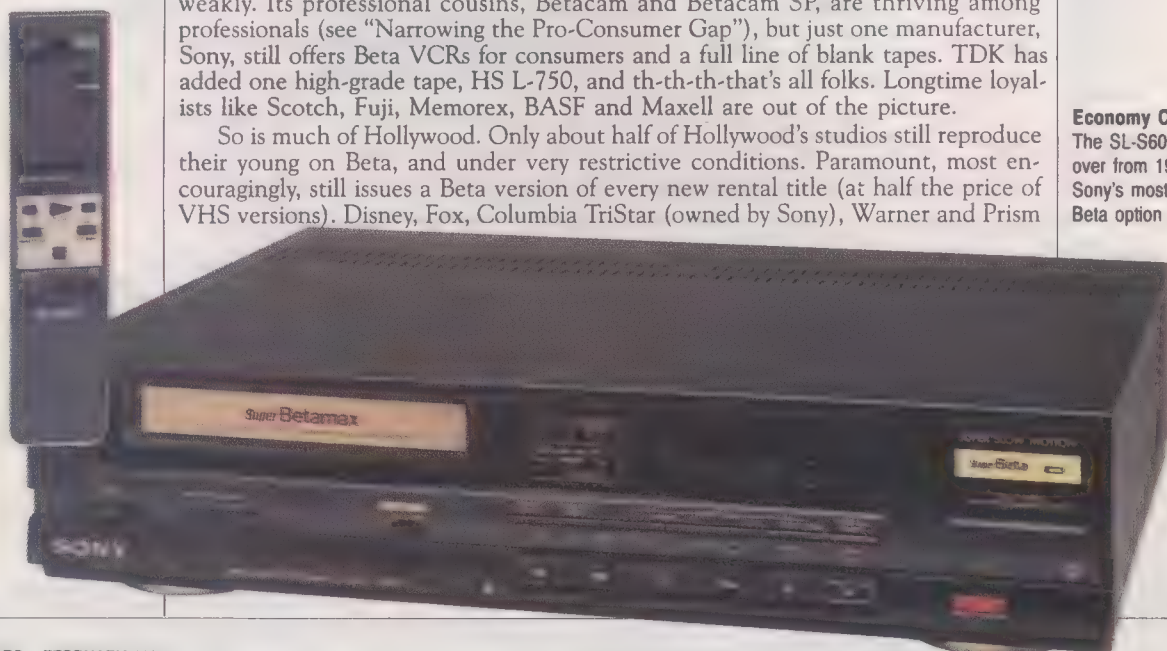
The good news is the format's still alive, the bad news is—maybe not for long.

You know who you are, Betaman. You're an early video adopter, an avid reader of product reviews and comparison tests. You're probably a lover of all things Sony and, surely, someone who's learned to tolerate abuse, as in: "So you still have that Betamax? I hear it makes a great doorstep." Or: "Where do you get tapes for that thing? The Video Club of Calcutta?"

Soon, it may come to this. Three years after our last Beta report ("The Beta Maze," Sept. '90), we find this once exalted format on the mat and breathing weakly. Its professional cousins, Betacam and Betacam SP, are thriving among professionals (see "Narrowing the Pro-Consumer Gap"), but just one manufacturer, Sony, still offers Beta VCRs for consumers and a full line of blank tapes. TDK has added one high-grade tape, HS L-750, and th-th-th-that's all folks. Longtime loyalists like Scotch, Fuji, Memorex, BASF and Maxell are out of the picture.

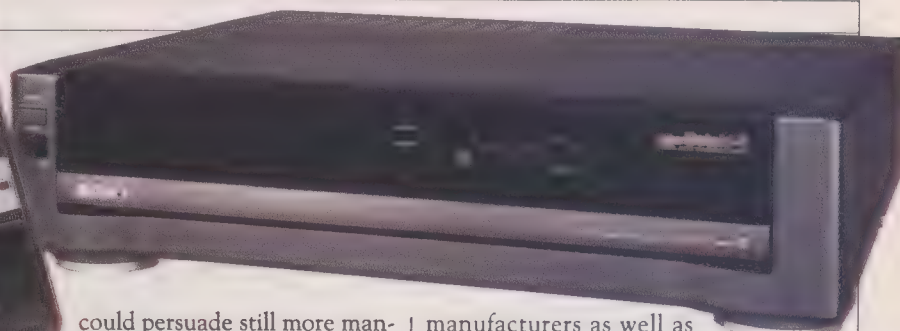
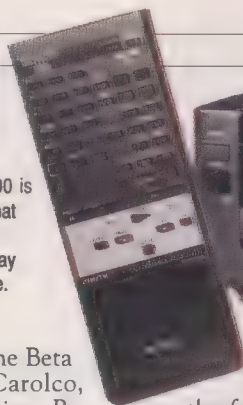
So is much of Hollywood. Only about half of Hollywood's studios still reproduce their young on Beta, and under very restrictive conditions. Paramount, most encouragingly, still issues a Beta version of every new rental title (at half the price of VHS versions). Disney, Fox, Columbia TriStar (owned by Sony), Warner and Prism

Economy Class:
The SL-S600, a hold-over from 1990, is Sony's most affordable Beta option at \$449.



Last of the Line?

Last year's SL-HF2000 is a full-featured deck that can record at Beta II and III speeds and play back in Beta 1s mode.



are also in the game. But the Beta no-shows include Live, Carolco, Playboy, Vidmark, New Line, Republic, Turner, Orion, HBO and MCA/Universal. Youch.

Adding insult to injury, a number of Beta-only shops and fanzines, once seen as the salvation of the business, have shut their doors or changed their names and format alliances. The former Beta Store in Phoenix now answers the phone "LaserVideo." What once was

could persuade still more manufacturers and retailers to leave the fold.

A few pockets of Beta strength remain. New York City and Los Angeles boast sizeable followings, as do the state of Wisconsin and the motor city of Dearborn, Michigan, where Ford engineers regularly show their appreciation of Sony technology by offering Sony-made CD, MD and DAT players in select car models. Houston has become ■

manufacturers as well as the 15 to 20 new titles still made available in Beta each month. "Our business is actually growing, because we're the ultimate in niche marketing," proclaims Ted Brauer of Brauer Trading in Woodcliff Lake, New Jersey, probably the biggest player in the Beta game.

While putting on a happy face, other Beta boosters admit their inventory is being cannibalized. "People buy 40 to 50 copies of a single title at \$1.99 each and record over them," says George Bednar of Dearborn's Adray Appliances. "It's ■ better deal than buying new Sony L-750s at \$3.99 each," about the cheapest blank Beta tapes go for these days.

Other dealers fear their limited supplies of new titles will soon be cut off. "If you've been thinking about buying Beta tapes, do it now—1994 is going to be a critical year for the format," frets Joe Kopsak of Absolute Beta in Remington, Virginia.

"Look at the numbers," grouched a major studio source, speaking off the record. "On our biggest title of 1993, the VHS pre-orders numbered in the millions. For Beta, it was 452. We did more than 10 times that number in laser video," he sighed. "For an average rental movie, VHS pre-orders are 175,000 to 200,000. What do we do in Beta? Twenty pieces. That's right, 20! The only thing that can save this format is a sci-

Beta Deluxe: The 15th anniversary SL-HF2100 includes a touch-screen remote control.

Beta Vision in Saskatchewan, Canada is now One Stop Video. The *Betaphile Recorder* newsletter? Finis.

And by the end of 1993, virtually every major distributor of pre-recorded tapes—Star Video, Ingram, Commtron, Major Video Concepts, Baker and Taylor—had dropped out of the Beta business, a bombshell that

shopping mecca for Beta customers flocking from Mexico, where first-generation Beta VCRs still survive in many households. (The same holds true in the Philippines, Australia, parts of South America and Indonesia, the other hotbeds of Beta strength around the world.)

A handful of "mom and pop" mail-order operations (see "Where to Find Beta Tapes and Decks") also continue to serve Beta devotees, by snapping up bargain close-outs from distributors and

NARROWING THE PRO-CONSUMER GAP

Betaphiles may be growing resigned to Beta's declining fortunes in the consumer marketplace, but it's a different story in professional circles where Betacam and Betacam SP, two powerful variations on the format consumers use, are narrowing the cost gap between consumer and professional video equipment. Sony recently announced a new line of professional Betacam editing components and VCRs at prices likely to shake up the semipro and industrial video markets.

The price breaks make pro quality more accessible. According to Bob Gilber, CEO of RGB Computer and Video, maker of the AmiLink A/B roll editing system, Sony "has brought the tools of broadcast television to the desktop producer." Gilber called the introduction "one of the most important developments in the desktop video production market."

Sony's new UVW-series Betacam SP editing components are actually cheaper than the video industry's

: workhorse format, 3/4-inch U-Matic SP. They're within : shooting distance of professional Hi8 gear and about : \$1,000 more than Panasonic's and JVC's top-of-the-line : S-VHS equipment. Sony also dropped the price of its : current broadcast-quality Betacam camcorder by 20 per- : cent to \$12,560, a new low, and added a line of less : costly professional videotape. The new Betacam VCRs, : complete with timebase correctors and time-code capa- : bility, cost from \$5,350 to \$9,450.

: Using these components, a professional, cuts-only : editing system can be assembled for about \$20,000, while : a multi-VCR A/B roll component system begins at about : \$35,000. Only two years ago, comparable systems would : have cost more than \$100,000, triple today's price.

: Sony's move is important to consumers because it : hastens the day when it will be possible to produce : professional-quality videos on affordable, conventional : desktop computers.

—Frank Beacham

entific discovery that VHS causes cancer." How the mighty have fallen.

BETA THEN THAN NOW

Perhaps you were there the day Sony delivered its first home video system in October 1975—a \$2,295 wood

veneered console housing not only a half-inch Betamax VCR, but a 19-inch color TV, reasonably large for the time. I spent hours at Sony's Fifth Avenue, New York showroom, marveling at the LV-1901 and wondering if it was worth selling a relative into slavery to buy it.

Where To Find Beta Tapes And Decks

You won't find Beta supplies on every corner, but thanks to mail order, you don't have to. Here are key tape and hardware suppliers and what they specialize in:

- Brauer Trading, Ltd., 26 Emery Lane, Woodcliff Lake, NJ 07675. Extensive catalogs and largest inventory (150,000 tapes) available of "factory fresh" titles, most \$6.95 to \$16.95, plus shipping and handling. Also offers five-for-\$19.95 deals and other discounts. Has good rapport with North Jersey neighbor Sony of America. Runs specials on VCRs, recently offering SL-HF2000 at \$599.

- Absolute Beta Video, Box 130, Remington, VA. 22734; phone: 800-WE-R-BETA (in Virginia:

703-439-8682). Inventory of 50,000 pre-recorded tapes, starting at \$1.99, including new titles and close-outs from Paramount, Academy, Live and New Line. Specializes in full-price Disney titles. Beta Video Club for buyers delivers seasonal catalogs. Also offers blank tapes and reconditioned and new VCRs and accessories.

- Adray Appliance/TV/Photo/Sound Center, 20219 Carlisle, Dearborn, MI 48124; phone: 313-274-9500, fax: 313-274-6874. Has mass quantities of 250 titles among a 75,000-tape inventory. Bargains range from \$1.99 for *Days of Thunder* to \$5.99 *Gone With the Wind* double tape set. Also stocks decks, including discontinued SL-HF360 SuperBeta hi-fi. Call or write for list.

- Audio/Video Plus, 1225 Waugh Drive, Houston, TX 77019 (phone: 713-526-9065); and 5509 Richmond, Houston, TX 77056 (phone: 713-782-8346). Hardware and software sales at both locations.

- Beta Library, Box 836224, Promenade Station, Richardson, TX 75083; phone: 214-233-4552, fax: 214-233-6329. Large inventory of older titles, typically priced at \$20.45 each, including shipping. Send No. 10 SASE for lists of tapes in general interest, adult, children's categories.

- Mera's Video, 1126 Broadway, Rockford, IL 61104; phone: 815-965-8621. Clearing out inventory of 3,000 titles at \$3.99 each. "Nothing newer than two years old." Also sells Beta VCRs.

- One Stop Video (formerly Beta Vision), 1504 22nd Street West, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada S7M0T1; phone: 306-652-4949. Inventory of 4,000 Beta titles, from \$5 to \$15.

This model and Beta in general were widely touted as the first home video system for the general public, an honor that should reside with the poorly performing AVCO Cartrivision TV/VCR console, which major department stores briefly promoted in 1973, two years before Beta's birth. Let's just say Betamax was the first *successful* home video recording format.

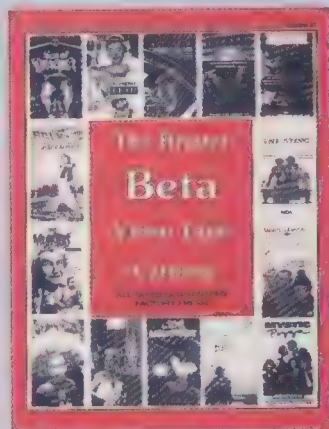
The liberating era of time-shifting and video collecting began for many when the first "transportable" Beta deck arrived in February, 1976. Sony's 44-pound SL-7200, looking a lot like the larger 3/4-inch U-Matic machines on which it was based, sold for the relatively low price of \$1,295. ("Okay, for you \$1,100, and I throw in a blank tape.") The salesman wrapped mine in stiff brown paper and twine with a handle on the side, encouraging me to carry it "on end." As a result, the tape transport was whacked out of alignment before I even got it home.

Early fans reveled in Beta's amazing quality. We convinced ourselves the one-hour recording capacity per \$16.95 tape was just God's way of keeping us from cluttering up the house with too many movie dubs and useless episodes of *Star Trek* and *Saturday Night Live*.

By late 1976, several other, incompatible VCR rivals were arriving. Quasar, a Matsushita company, premiered its VX-2000 Great Time Machine. Sanyo presented V-Cord II. Then JVC, a company backed by Matsushita but technically independent, introduced Vidstar, the first in a format dubbed VHS. The cognoscenti pooh-poohed VHS as a technology Sony invented then abandoned, allowing rival companies, under Japanese law, to use the patent. "Beta is Better," the mantra went.

The three words became a litany loyalists would repeat almost every time they used Beta VCRs and, later, when programming timer recordings in a wink with a jog/shuttle dial, a special joy reserved at the time for Sony's SL-HF900 and SL-HF1000 VCRs. We yelled Beta Is Better loudest at the pulse pumping moments when Sony and other Beta companies (Sanyo, Toshiba, Zenith, Sears and Aiwa) introduced major improvements, like Betamovie, the first integrated video camcorder, and the first

continued on page 82



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VO550... full size

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E700... Image stable
UCS3... digital special effects
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L2... NEW! NEW! NEW!

JVC
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CAMCORDERS (*free case)
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GR-AX35U... built in light
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GR-S21U... super VHS-C

VCR's
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HR-VP604... jog/shuttle
HR-VP606... VCR Plus
HR-VP700... top of the line!
HR-S4900U... NEW! NEW! NEW!
HR-S6900U... audio dub

KODAK PHOTO CD
PCD 270... photo CD
PCD 870... TELE/PAN
PCD 5870... multi disc

Panasonic CAMCORDERS C-FORMAT
PV-IQ203... 10:1 zoom
PV-IQ303... light and remote
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PV-IQ503... 4 HD stereo
PV-43... image stable
PV-53... color viewfinder
PV-S63... super VHS
PV-S372... super VHS

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PV-M2043... 20" Combo
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PV-4314... VCR Plus
PV-4351... 4 Head Hi-Fi
PV-4361... Hi-Fi VCR Plus
PV-4362... shuttle control
PV-S4366... super VHS
PV-S4380... built in TBC

RICOH CAMCORDERS
R-18H... same as TR-101

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M-658... VCR Plus C 3
M-759... jog/shuttle

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AG-3... 3 chip/SVHS
AG-186... CLOSEOUT

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AG-7650H... player only
AG-7750H... player/recorder
AGA96... controller
AGF700... time code generator

MONITORS
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CT-1384VY... 13" w/ tuner
2083Y... 20" video monitor
2083VY... 20" w/ tuner
BT-H1350Y... multi standard

A/V MIXERS
WJ-MX30... digital field synch.
WJ-MX50... digital frame synch.

SONY Authorized Dealer
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EVO09700... Hi8 dual deck
SVO-9600... SVHS VCR
SVP-9000... SVHS play only

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MDP-1150... laser bar code

MONITORS
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GVM 2020... 20" Multi scan

FutureVideo A/B ROLL EDIT CONTROL SYSTEM
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•EDIT LINK 3300/TC
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A PRESSING MATTER

BY KENNETH KORMAN

Come with us on a guided tour of a state-of-the-art laserdisc factory

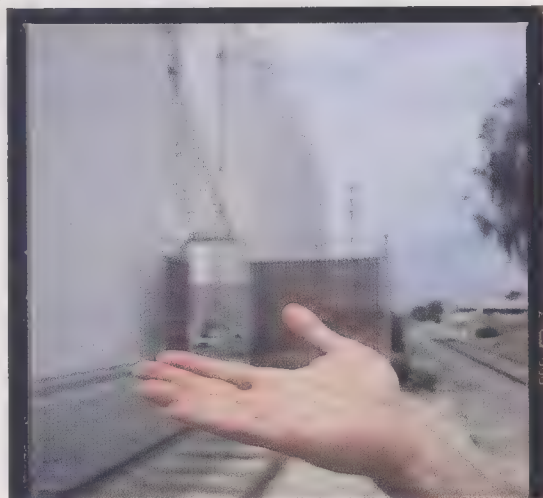
With a fervor bordering on religious, laserdisc fans are quick to describe the many joys of the videophile's undisputed format of choice. Sure, laserdisc delivers the best pictures and sound available. But lines of resolution and dynamic range aside, it somehow manages to capture the intangible magic of great movies and musical performances that lesser formats miss. Laser's full benefits can't be measured on a test bench, which only adds to its considerable mystique.

Despite their devotion, few laserphiles have a clear understanding of the delicate process by which these amazing discs are manufactured. Where do those large, shiny platters come from anyway?

For the most part, they come from Pioneer Video Manufacturing (PVM), the Carson, California facility that makes as much as 80 percent of the consumer laserdiscs sold in America. So we requested a tour of this suburban Los Angeles pressing plant to find out for ourselves just how laserdisc quality is achieved. Accompanying us on our journey were David Wallace, Pioneer Laserdisc Corp. of America (LDCA) marketing manager, and Matt Friedman, PVM national sales manager. (Both LDCA—one of the two major distributors of laserdisc software in this country—and PVM are subsidiaries of Pioneer Electric Corp.)

Before we began the tour, Wallace and Friedman filled us in on how laser software works. Picture and sound data are carried in microscopic pits imbedded

Raw Materials: PVM uses three or four 90-ton shipments of acrylic pellets each month to press laserdiscs. In the background are four silos full of the substance.



in each disc, about 14 million per side in the CAV format. (If a single pit were the size of a football, a laserdisc would be the size of Los Angeles, or about 30 miles across.) Minute variations in the length of these pits change the quantity of light reflected by the disc when hit by a laser for playback. Laserdisc players convert these modulations into video and audio signals that TVs and A/V receivers understand.

With such detail and technical accuracy required of each laserdisc, we expected—and found—an intricate and carefully controlled manufacturing process at PVM. When the facility opened in 1982, capacity was limited to 10,000 discs per month in a single 85,000-square-foot plant. Today, PVM has five separate laserdisc production lines in two buildings, including a 265,000-square-foot facility added in October '91. Total capacity is now 1.5 million discs per month, and the facility typically runs at 50 to 60 percent of capacity.

PVM makes laserdiscs for both the consumer and industrial markets in the U.S. as well as PAL-format discs for the European markets. It's the largest laserdisc plant in America, and the second-largest in the world after Pioneer's Kofu, Japan facility. The plant is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week; 450 employees keep PVM pumping out around 1,000 different laser titles each month, including industrial projects.

Perhaps the most important step in the production of laserdiscs doesn't occur at this or any other laser manufacturing facility. PVM receives what is known as an "edit master" from a studio client, a D-2 digital videocassette that contains a completed film-to-video transfer of a program. The care taken with this transfer is the single most important element in the production of a first-rate laserdisc.

Material for each side of a laserdisc arrives on a separate D-2 cassette, so side-breaks are determined by the releasing studio. Accompanying the cassettes is a printed list of chapters, stop frames and the like with SMPTE time code numbers. The cassettes are sent to PVM's video processing department, where the first of hundreds of quality control checks is performed. The tapes are played back in real time, and the re-

Building The Perfect Disc

1.



2.



Scene 1: Banks of D-2 digital VCRs play back the "edit master" cassettes delivered by movie studios to Pioneer Video Manufacturing (PVM), the largest laserdisc plant in America. Scene 2: A Pioneer technician performs a real-time visual check of an edit master, adding the codes needed for chapter stops and other special features.

3.

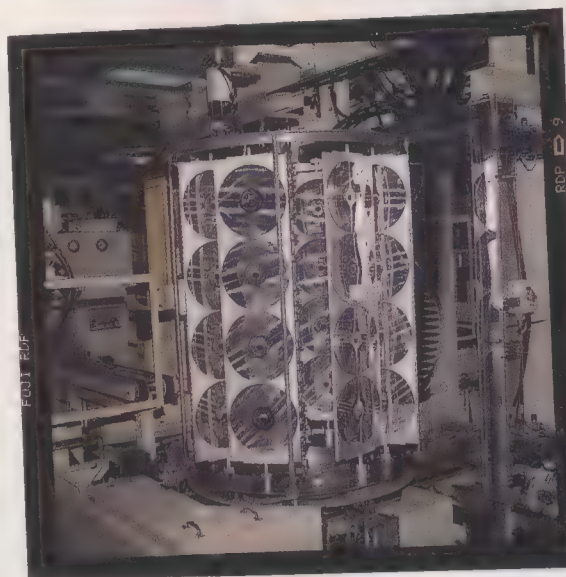


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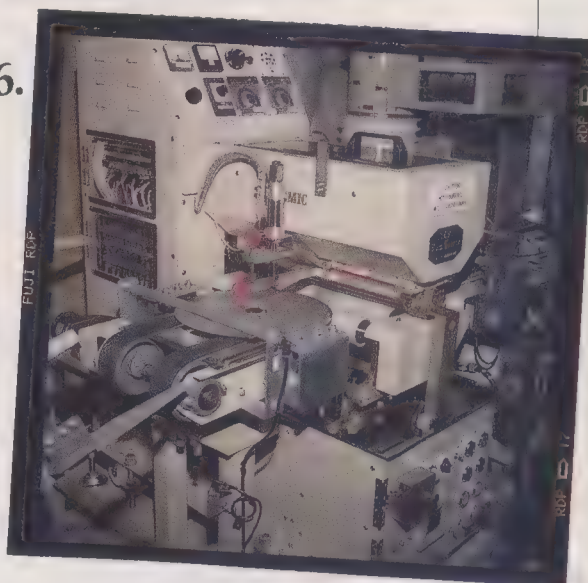


The automated mastering process is controlled from the remote facility shown in Scene 3, where an operator watches the action on a monitor. The mastering process results in the creation of a metal stamper, which is used to mold the clear plastic discs in Scene 4.

5.

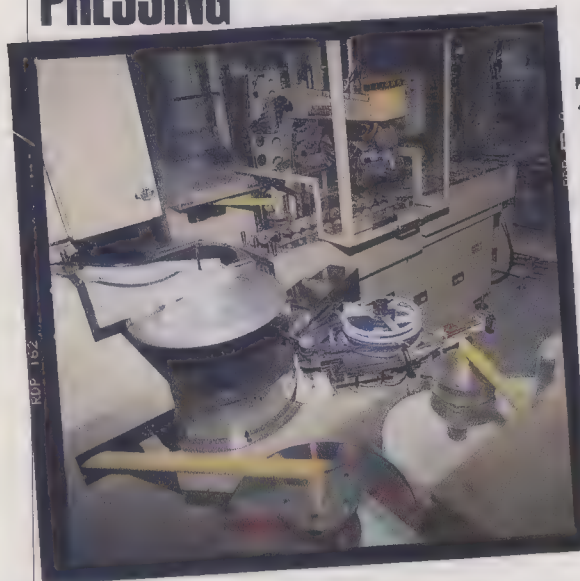


6.



An automated carrier takes the clear discs to the metalizing machine in Scene 5, which coats BB discs at a time with a thin layer of aluminum. An even thinner overcoat is applied to the discs by the machine in Scene 6, protecting the new surface from scuffing.

PRESSING



7.

The bonding machine that glues the two metalized sides of a laserdisc together can be seen in the background of Scene 7, while an edging machine that smooths the bonded discs' sharp edges, making them safe to handle, is in the foreground. PVM's in-house print shop churns out laserdisc labels in Scene 8.



8.



9.

Video Magazine senior editor Kenneth Korman, Pioneer LDCA marketing manager David Wallace and PVM national sales manager Matt Friedman give the thumbs-up to a newly minted batch of laserdiscs in Scene 9. The finished discs are sent to the packaging department in Scene 10, where they are put into jackets, shrinkwrapped and shipped.

10.



quested chapter encoding is generated via computer.

If there are any problems with the edit master, PVM contacts the appropriate studio. PVM has questions regarding about half the edit masters, and about a quarter of the programs are actually sent back to the studio for further work. In all cases, the studio receives a "check cassette" with laser encoding for final approval. Pioneer LDCA often has substantial involvement in the early stages of laser production for titles it distributes exclusively, such as those from Paramount, Vidmark, Pioneer Artists and Pioneer Special Editions.

Much of the two large remaining processes—mastering and replication—is automated, with special tasks performed by a variety of remote-controlled

robots. Mastering and replication both take place in what are known as "clean rooms," where the air is filtered and exchanged to clear out particles that can wreak havoc on laserdisc quality. In PVM's new mastering room, clean air is pumped in from the ceiling and pushed down through the floor so that the air is completely exchanged more than once every minute.

Mastering begins when a flat, round piece of polished plate glass is coated with a 1-micron layer of photo-resist, which functions just like emulsion on 35mm film. The glass is placed in a mastering machine equipped with a laser-beam recorder. The master tape is played back and a modulator translates the audio/video information into pulses of light. The laser shines through a shut-

ter that opens and closes electronically more than 8 million times per second, exposing the photo-resist on the disc as it spins. A developing solution is applied to the disc, removing the photo-resist exposed by the laser and leaving a series of "pits" in its place. The resulting disc is called a "glass master."

A thin layer of nickel is then evaporated onto the glass master, filling in all the pits. After a thicker layer of nickel is electroplated over the thin layer, the metal is peeled away from the glass master. The pits are thus transferred to the metal in reverse, resulting in a laserdisc "stamper." A protective coating is applied to the metal stamper, and the glass master can then be repolished and recycled for use on another title.

Throughout the mastering process,

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| 8mm | |
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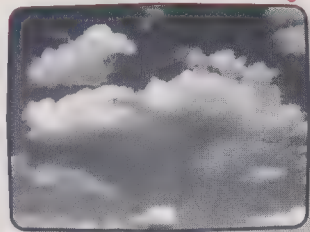
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the disc and the stamper remain untouched by human hands. A remote console is used to control the robots that shepherd the materials along. While we were in the control room—which was as close as we were allowed to get to this stage of the process—Warner's letterboxed edition of *Sommersby* was being mastered.

After more quality control procedures to check the metal stamper, the replication process begins. Wearing disposable cotton suits, hats and masks, we entered the replication area. Even though the air in the replication clean room isn't as stringently controlled as that of the mastering area, it's still 50 times cleaner than a hospital operating room—all in the name of high-quality home video.

Two stampers—one each for the A- and B-sides of a disc—are loaded into twin injection molding machines. Meanwhile, acrylic resin pellets are held in special bins that lead directly into these machines. (The acrylic comes into the factory on Pioneer's own railroad cars at a rate of three or four 90-ton shipments per month.) The stampers are spin-balanced like the wheels of a car, and adjusted for thickness, weight, pressure and temperature. The acrylic pellets are melted just before being injected into the chambers with the stampers, resulting in two clear plastic discs.

A carousel carries the clear plastic discs to a vacuum chamber, where a layer of aluminum is evaporated onto the molded side of each disc, creating the familiar reflective surface. A thin protective overcoat then goes onto the aluminum, and the two halves are bonded together with glue so that the "pitted," metalized sides of the discs are facing in toward one another with only an adhesive layer between them. The smooth acrylic sides are therefore on the *outside* of each laserdisc, so oily fingertips can cause no damage to the molded surfaces on the inside.

The bonding machine reads bar codes on the label area of each half-disc to make sure that two parts of the same title are bonded together. We watched as robotic machines carried the discs through this amazingly precise process. Freshly pressed copies of MCA/Universal's *Scent of a Woman* and MGM/UA's *2001: A Space Odyssey* whizzed by on motorized carousels. About 40 titles are replicated each day, while some 300 titles can be found throughout the entire PVM production process at any given moment.

The labels for the discs are made in PVM's own in-house print shop, while the jackets are printed outside the factory. In the packaging operation, finished discs are placed in onion skin or

paper sleeves, put into jackets, shrink-wrapped and shipped either across the street to the Pioneer LDCA warehouse or to individual releasing studios. From there the discs go directly to the video stores of the U.S. and Europe, where laserphiles eagerly await the latest and greatest in home entertainment. ■

DESKTOP

continued from page 40

gram that does exactly what we described two paragraphs ago) with *QuickTime 1.6*. When *Premiere 3.0* is run on a state-of-the-art Mac Quadra with a top-notch video capture board, loads of memory and a huge hard drive, the quality lies on the border between amateur and professional video. But you're talking about a \$15,000 system.

For now, digital video editing is really for off-line applications—experimenting with different cuts and effects until you get the result you want, so you can later use your editing decisions when you edit for real (on-line) on videotape.

Two other applications are often confused with desktop video, but they really don't deserve the title. The first is watching TV on a computer screen. This is made possible by add-on adapter boards, like the WatchIT! mentioned earlier. Many of these TV boards let you grab frames and adjust the size of the TV window that plays onscreen, and most also have inputs so you can watch video from a VCR, camcorder or laserdisc player on your computer. Apple now makes a Macintosh that has this capability built in. But the use of these boards for anything other than passive TV watching is limited, so they can't really be considered desktop video—desktop TV is more like it.

The second quasi-desktop video application is interactive multimedia. As file formats like *QuickTime* gain popularity, they've been used to add video segments to interactive CD-ROMs. A good example is Voyager's *A Hard Day's Night*, which includes a complete *QuickTime* version of the classic Beatles movie, in addition to many interactive extras. But again, this application has little or nothing to do with producing your own videos.

One day, all video will be digital, and almost all editing will be done on computers, without a VCR in sight. But for the time being, the desktop video products we've discussed above will give you a taste of that future, and tap you into some pretty powerful capabilities that will make your videos better than you ever dreamed. ■

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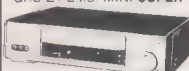
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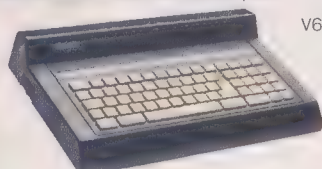
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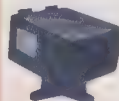
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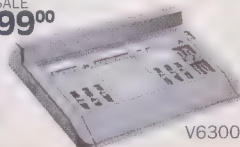
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Add narration as you're video taping! Monitor camcorder audio.

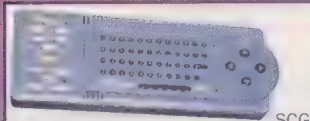
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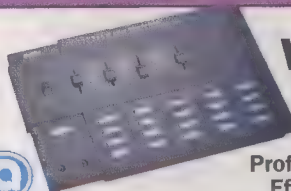


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Edit out unwanted scenes. Brighten & correct colors. Bring back sharpness & detail. Add narration and/or bkgd music.

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VideoPro Magic

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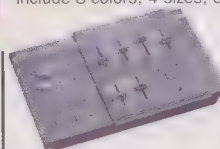
For less than \$400.00 you can create amazing studio effects that, until now, cost \$1500 & more!! VideoPro Magic features:

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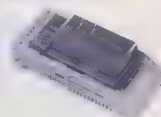
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FX Video Ed/it 4 SVHS/Hi8 compatible special effects editor with crossfade, color fades, and hundreds of wipe patterns

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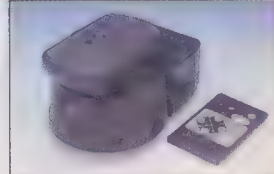
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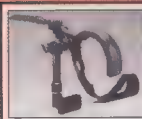
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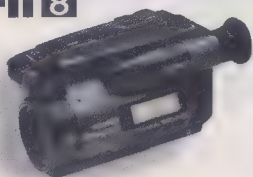
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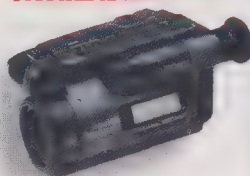
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- RC TIME CODE



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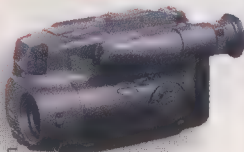
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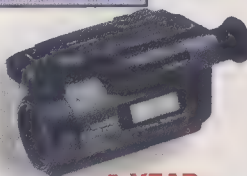
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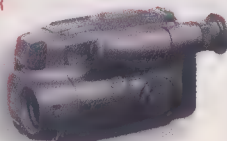
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- HI-FI STEREO
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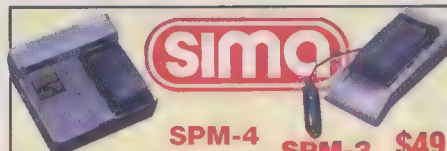
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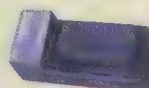
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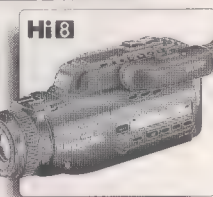
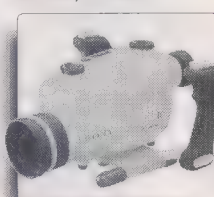
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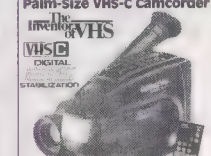
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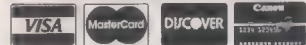
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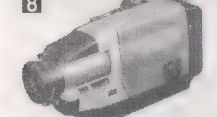
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VM-E55A EIS, hard case, light
VM-H57A Hi-8 E.I.S.
VM-H38A Hi-Band
VM-H39A Hi-8 w/case, light
VM-SP1A Water Resistant
VHS CAMCORDERS
VM-1600A 12x Power Zoom
VM-2600A 24x Digital Zoom
VM-S8200A Super-VHS

VIDEO RECORDERS
VHS HQ



VT-M171A Quick Start
VT-M270A 4 Head
VT-M272A VCR Plus+
VT-F370A 4 Head, Hi-Fi
VT-F372A 4 Head, Hi-Fi
VT-S772A S-VHS, 5 Head

HITACHI
Hi-8 Ultra Compact
LCD COLOR
VIEW MONITOR
Hi8
EIS
VM-H39A



16/64x Digital Zoom
Electronic Image Stabilizer
• Hi-Fi stereo & remote
• Special FX & Char. Generat.
• 470,000 pixel CCD
w/Hitachi soft case & light
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Hi 8mm Camcorder
Hi8
EIS
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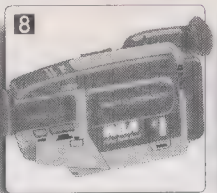
Electronic Image Stabilizer
1 Lux Low Light
• Hi-band 8mm system
• Multi-brand TV/
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leap forward - colors are rich &
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Multi-function remote controls
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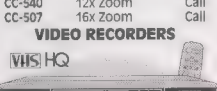


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Pro 830 10x Zoom
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Pro 883HB Hi-Band
Pro 950 E.I.S., 16x Zoom+
RCA 888HB Hard Case
RCA 2 hr. battery (8B120)

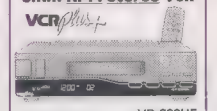
VHS CAMCORDERS
CC-412 12x Zoom
CC-340 12x Zoom
CC-507 16x Zoom



VIDEO RECORDERS
VHS HQ

VR-319 2 Head
VR-501 4 Head
VR-526A Built-in VCR+
VR-601HF 4 Head Hi-Fi
VR-658HF Front A/V
VR-662HF 4 Head Hi-Fi
VR-664HF Built-in VCR+
VR-667HF Hi-Fi VCR+
VR-720HF S-VHS
VR-800HF 8mm VCR+

RCA
8mm Hi-Fi Stereo VCR
VCR Plus+
VR-800HF



• Hi-Fi stereo
• VCR+ system built-in
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• Flying erase head
• Universal remote control
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TV/VCR COMBO
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VV-1220 20" TV/VCR

HITACHI
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* Comes w/soft case
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VL-W1 12x Power Zoom
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VL-E40 4" Monitor Viewcam
VL-HL100 Hi-8, 4" Monitor

SHARP
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SHARP VIEWCAM
AN ABSOLUTE ORIGINAL
Hi8
VL-HL100U



The first camcorder to re-
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No-strain shooting, instant
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• Digital Image Stabilizer
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• Sports Pack

SHARP
3" Color LCD Viewcam
SHARP VIEWCAM
AN ABSOLUTE ORIGINAL
Hi8
VL-E30



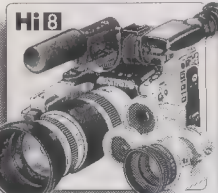
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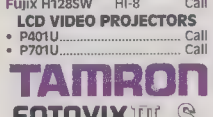


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Fujix H128SW Hi-8
LCD VIDEO PROJECTORS
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• P701U

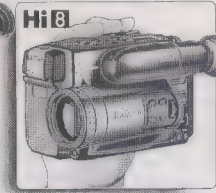


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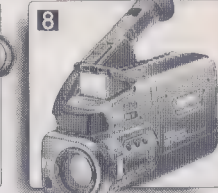


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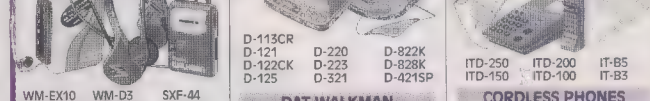
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& VIDEO BAG LINE IN STOCK

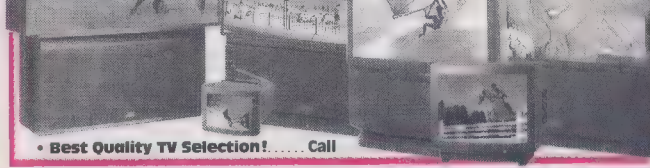
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WM-FX38 SRF-39 SRF-M50
WM-FX41 SRF-H2 SRF-M70
WM-FX45 SRF-HM20 WM-SXF10
WM-F008 SRF-8 WM-SXF30
WM-FX52 SRF-88 WM-SXF33
WM-FX56 SXF-39 WM-F2078

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D-121 D-223 D-828K
D-125 D-321 D-4215P
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SPP-A60 SPP-170 SPP-77
SPP-X90 SPP-160 SPP-75
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SPP-320 SPP-97
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TAM-50 TAM-1000



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• MX-C9S Satellite spkrs., Subwfr.
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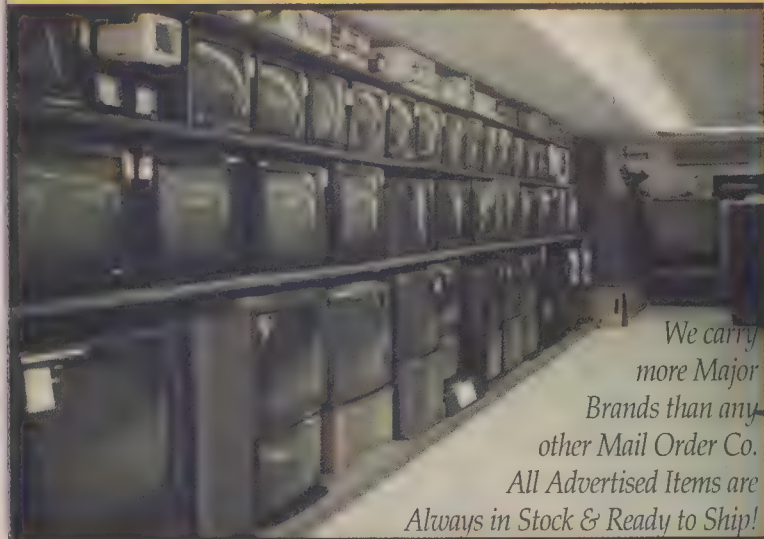


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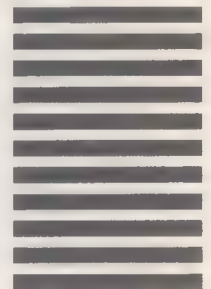
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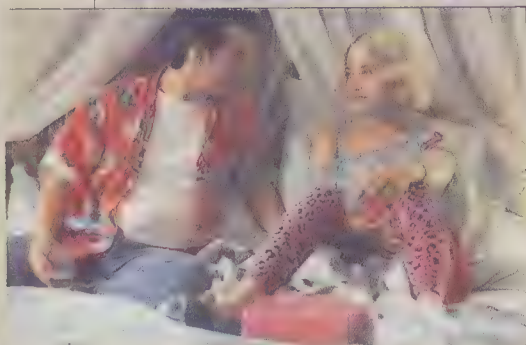
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TAPES & DISCS

N E W R E L E A S E S

FEATURE FILMS



Love Crimes: Slater and Arquette find *True Romance*.

True Romance

1993. Christian Slater, Patricia Arquette; dir. Tony Scott. Surround, cc. (R) 119 min. or (NR) 121 min. priced for rental. LD letterboxed \$39.98. Warner.

Anyone expecting *Sleepless in Seattle II* on the basis of this movie's title is due for the shock of his life. Bracingly violent, profane and morally nihilistic, *True Romance* is—if nothing else—a welcome blow against wimpy movies.

It's love at first sight when Clarence Worley (Christian Slater), employee of a Detroit comic book store, and fledgling hooker Alabama Whitman (Patricia Arquette) meet at a Sonny Chiba triple feature. On the spur of the moment they decide to get married. Then they get tattooed. Then Clarence decides to settle accounts with Alabama's pimp. Nastiness ensues, setting off a chain of events that lands Clarence, Alabama and a big pile of cocaine in Los Angeles, pursued by police, mobsters and a lot of people for whom life is one big movie metaphor.

True Romance is based on an early script by Quentin Tarantino, and much of it seems like a rough draft of *Reservoir Dogs*. The violence is not for the squeamish (particularly in the unrated ver-

sion), but the dialog is terrific, and there are lots of show-offy parts for an impressive cast (topped by Gary Oldman, Christopher Walken, Dennis Hopper and Val Kilmer).

On the down side, Tony Scott (*Beverly Hills Cop II*) was a poor choice to direct—he amplifies Tarantino's excesses and buries everything else. And his widescreen action sequences are carelessly cropped in this non-letterboxed video. By any objective critical standards, it's not a great movie. Still, unless you're overly sensitive, it sure is entertaining.

—M. Faust

Hard Target

1993. Jean-Claude Van Damme, Lance Henriksen; dir. John Woo. Surround. (R) 97 min. priced for rental. LD letterboxed \$34.98. MCA/Universal.

When making the promotional rounds for this, his first Hollywood project, celebrated Hong Kong action director John Woo expressed trepidations about how studio execs might water

down his distinctive style for U.S. consumption. Not just the violence, mind you, although that had to be cut to avoid an NC-17 rating; he was also concerned about deleting some of the peculiarly poetic flourishes he employs at crucial moments in his pictures. He needn't have worried: While *Hard Target* presents an occasionally diluted version of the Woo worldview, it's still an absolute knockout—the best action picture of 1993, and far and away the best Jean-Claude Van Damme vehicle ever.

Temporarily abandoning the male-bonding relationships that animated his Hong Kong pictures and working with a plot line that borrows much from the classic *The Most Dangerous Game*, Woo tries to turn Van Damme into an East-woodesque icon, and almost pulls it off. The martial-arts star plays a down-on-his-luck vet who becomes the prey of nihilistic baddies (led by the reptilian Lance Henriksen) who run a very elite hunting club—one that tracks humans.

Woo clearly had a ball working with



Holy molars: Jean-Claude Van Damme bites off as much as he can chew in *Hard Target*.

Spoofmeisters:
Cary Elwes (left) in
*Robin Hood: Men in
Tights* and Charlie
Sheen in *Hot Shots!
Part Deux*.



the sophisticated Hollywood hardware that the more austere Hong Kong film industry has denied him—this is his first film in stereo, let alone Dolby Surround—and the action sequences are among the most exhilarating and inventive he's ever filmed. *Hard Target* never fails to dazzle, but Woo wants to move you as well, and the fact that he succeeds in doing this, despite his lug of a male lead and the restrictions placed on him by the higher-ups, is a testament to his exceptional talent. The tape looks great, and I'm sure the letterboxed laser-disc will play even better.

—Glenn Kenny

The Match Factory Girl

1990. Kati Outinen, Vesa Vierikko; wr./dir. Aki Kaurismaki. Mono, subtitled. (NR) 70 min. \$79.95. Kino on Video.

Iris (Kati Outinen) is the last person in the production line in the match factory. After work she returns to the grim apartment she shares with her grim, silent mom and stepdad. At night she's the one who's never asked to dance. The red dress she splurges on attracts the attention of a well-off creep who knocks her up and dumps her. She buys rat poison. She uses it, too—but not on herself.

Does this sound like one of those Robert Bresson movies about suffering humanity? Actually, *The Match Factory Girl* is the comedy Bresson probably should have made but didn't. Aki Kaurismaki, Finland's main movie export, is out to pepper the foibles of his notoriously unsmiling people with understated satire. Iris' bleak life is underscored with little details that make it seem all the more ridiculous. The lack of dialog—there's so little that it's almost a silent movie—is funny in itself. And at 70 minutes the picture certainly doesn't wear out its welcome.

The Leningrad Cowboys, the very bad, weirdly-toussured rockers of an earlier, inferior Kaurismaki movie, turn up in a mock music video, *Those Were the Days*, at the start of the tape. Don't let it keep you from watching the feature.

—Sol Louis Siegel

Hot Shots! Part Deux

1993. Charlie Sheen, Lloyd Bridges; co-wr./dir. Jim Abrahams. Surround, cc. (PG-13) 89 min. priced for rental. FoxVideo.

Robin Hood: Men In Tights

1993. Cary Elwes, Tracey Ullman; dir. Mel Brooks. Surround, cc. (PG-13) 105 min. priced for rental. FoxVideo.

True to the law of sequels, *Hot Shots! Part Deux* doesn't match the original, but director Jim Abrahams and crew don't miss by much, feverishly cranking out jokes like there's no tomorrow. Deadpan leading man Charlie Sheen returns as lovelorn hero Topper Harley, this time leading a suicide mission to rescue American hostages in Iraq. Along with spirited mockery of *Rambo* and similar testosterone fests—"Bloodiest Movie Ever!" proclaims a caption after one shootout—this breathless farce spoofs everything from *Basic Instinct* to *Star Wars* to *Casablanca*. Even when a gag flops, there's often something happening in the background to pick up the slack. The glimpses of celibate monks at an ashram trying to impress a sexy CIA agent (Brenda Bakke) are priceless.

However flawed, *Part Deux* towers above *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*. Once vital and raucous, Mel Brooks now seems merely tired: His low humor has sunk to Three Stooges depths, while sluggish pacing underscores the movie's painful predictability. The cast adds little, with Cary Elwes (in the title role), Richard Lewis, Roger Rees and other lost souls operating at low intensity. Any time Tracey Ullman isn't funny, you've got big problems.

—Jon Young

Twist

1993. Chubby Checker, Dick Clark; dir. Ron Mann. Surround. (PG) 78 min. priced for rental. LD \$49.95. New Line.

Some people said it was like stamping out a burning cigarette with both feet, while others compared it to drying your rear with a towel. Thirty years after the fact, the hip-swiveling gyrations of

EDITOR'S CHOICE

by

kenneth korman

Some movies create controversy with taboo subject matter, while others do so through the style with which they present difficult topics. It's a rare film, such as Australian writer/director Geoffrey Wright's **Romper Stomper** (Academy Elite; VHS priced for rental), that manages to stir up trouble on both counts at once. This fictional yet all-too-real portrait of neo-Nazi "skinheads"—illiterate, unemployed and out for blood in the dilapidated streets of Melbourne—had Australian audiences and critics alternately lauding its social awareness and denouncing its supposed glorification of violence. With the added intimacy afforded by the small screen, it becomes impossible to fault the politics or considerable art of Wright's riveting debut film.

Romper Stomper's detractors point to the visceral thrill delivered by its relentlessly fast-paced scenes of violence, believing that this pleasure somehow constitutes a sort of inadvertent complicity on the part of the audience. But the film succeeds mainly at relentless realism. Whether it's roughhousing among friends, casual sex, a vicious assault or—as in one mind-boggling sequence—all of the above, the film's frenetic physical pace reflects the senseless hysteria of racial hatred. It's a message that sticks with you after the film ends. Quick cutting and a punky rock'n'-roll score are merely the necessary tools at the director's disposal.

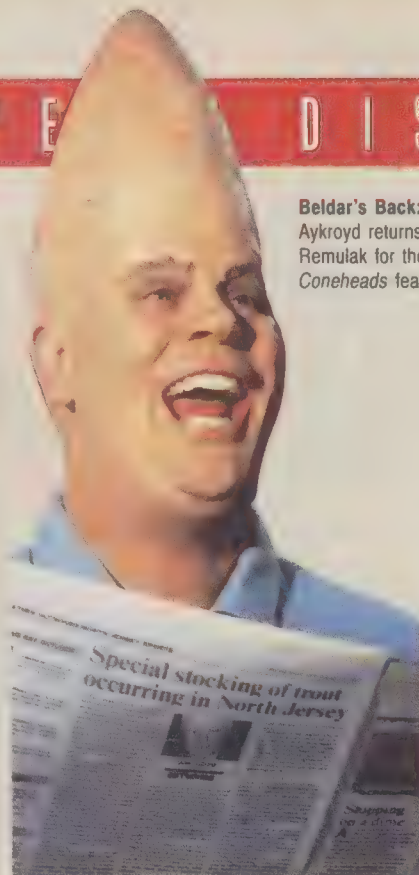
Even with an NC-17 rating, this movie won three Australian Institute Awards, that country's equivalent to our beloved Oscars. (Russell Crowe received a well-deserved Best Actor laurel for his blazing performance as top skinhead Hando.) But it's far from the kind of film Hollywood ever chooses to recognize. So don't be misled: *Romper Stomper* is a raw, low-budget picture that runs purely on adrenaline. Its brutal honesty is certainly not for everyone, as urgent and timely as it is.

Rent it as soon as you can. ■



Romper Stomper

Beldar's Back: Dan Aykroyd returns from Remulak for the *Coneheads* feature film.



the twist seem ludicrous, but that hasn't stopped director Ron Mann from making an irresistible documentary on the hottest dance of the early '60s. The suitably breezy *Twist* ponders the genesis of this goofy fad, blending vintage clips and modern-day interviews in a delightful pop-culture cocktail.

Beginning with the stodginess of establishment (i.e., white) entertainment in the pre-Elvis era, Mann shows how black music brought rhythm to the mainstream, resulting in the dances that were popularized via Dick Clark's *American Bandstand*. Movers and shakers reminiscing include the great Motown choreographer Cholly Atkins, Hank Ballard, who wrote and recorded the original version of "The Twist," and Chubby Checker, who made it a hit, while performance footage of the Flamingos, Louis Prima, Smokey Robinson and others recaptures the excitement of the day. Though *Twist* emphasizes fun, it doesn't ignore reality: *Bandstand* alumni ruefully recall subtle racism, and the looming specters of the Beatles and the JFK assassination imply this age of innocence was destined to be brief. —JY



Age of Innocence: *Twist* chronicles the early 60s dance craze.

Coneheads

1993. Dan Aykroyd; dir. Steve Barron. Surround, cc. (PG) 87 min. priced for rental. LD letterboxed \$34.98. Paramount.

File this one under "Better than it had any right to be." Dan Aykroyd and Jane Curtin reprise their *Saturday Night Live* roles as the would-be conquerors from the planet Remulak, adapting to life in suburban Paramus, New Jersey.

There's a sweet message lurking in here—that America is still a place

where people from different cultures can be accepted and assimilated into the melting pot. It's to the credit of Beldar and Prymaat's neighbors that they don't pay much attention to their bizarre behavior and precise but absurd grasp of the language (after all, "chlorophyll

stalk shear" is every bit as good a term as "lawn mower").

Lest this sound like a Frank Capra comedy, though, *Coneheads* is for the most part simply silly, with a plethora of gratuitous cameos from SNL players. And it was a mistake to replace original Conehead daughter Laraine Newman (reduced to a nearly invisible bit part) with Michelle Burke, who doesn't seem to get

the joke. Still, if you don't giggle at the sound of Conehead ruler Dave Thomas commanding Beldar to "Narflo the Garthok!", stick with Oscar Wilde.

Fans are hereby warned that the new *The Best of Saturday Night Live: The Coneheads* cassette, released on video in conjunction with the *Coneheads* feature, merely compiles three of the syndicated half-hour SNL shows, each featuring one Conehead skit.

—M. Faust

Bad Behavior

1993. Stephen Rea, Sinead Cusack; dir. Les Blair. Surround, subtitled. (R) 103 min. priced for rental. LD \$34.98. Vidmark.

Meandering and unobtrusive, *Bad Behavior* practically dares you to overlook its genteel charms. Reportedly improvised from a 25-page story synopsis, director Les Blair's low-key comedy testifies to the subtle pleasures of sympathetic ensemble acting, focusing on the interplay between Stephen Rea and Sinead Cusack. As Gerry and Ellie McAllister, an Irish couple living in London, this smart twosome depicts the daily trials and minor joys of married life without resorting to showy flourishes. If TV's *Seinfeld* is about nothing, *Bad Behavior* is about less than nothing.

The middle-class McAllisters face unremarkable dilemmas: Gerry's a city planner who's bored with his job and vaguely attracted to a younger co-worker (Saira Todd); Ellie's desperate to be more than a mom, yet finds it difficult to transcend domestic demands. Whenever the plot starts to drift into soap opera, comic relief arrives in the guise of sleazy contractor Howard Spink (Philip Jackson) and the dim Nunn Brothers (both played by Phil Daniels), who've been hired to modernize the bathroom. While a few significant events occur along the way, it's the small gestures, the raised eyebrows and the awkward conversations that carry this deceptively complex film. Hardly mass-appeal fare, but rewarding for the patient. —JY

Bodies, Rest & Motion

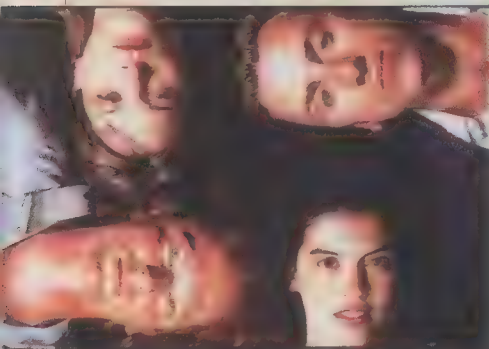
1993. Tim Roth, Bridget Fonda, Eric Stoltz, Phoebe Cates; dir. Michael Steinberg. Surround, cc. (R) 94 min. priced for rental. Criterion LD \$49.95. New Line.

Nick (Tim Roth) is a hard-drinking, angst-ridden TV salesman in small-town Arizona, referred to (with exasperation) by girlfriends both former and current as "f*****g Nick." Beth (Bridget Fonda) is his current girlfriend, Carol (Phoebe Cates) his ex, and they're all the best of friends. Enter Eric Stoltz as a housepainter who's sure he and Beth are made for each other. His "Everything I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten" wisdom provides an alternative to Nick's tortured existence, and Beth has to choose.

Why the short theatrical run for this

film full of young big-name stars? Visually, it has a slickness reminiscent of a music video or commercial. Come to think of it, the script is like ■ Levi's Dockers commercial expanded to 94 minutes, soullessness intact. This pretentious film's title comes from Newton's first law of motion: "A body at rest or in motion will remain in that state unless acted upon by some outside force." Given a choice, I'd opt for a game of pinball.

—Brian Clark



The Young and the Restless: *Bodies, Rest and Motion's* twentysomethings can't get it together.

LASERDISCS

The Twilight Zone, Vol. 1

1959-64. B&W. Gig Young, Jack Klugman, Gladys Cooper, Billy Mumy, Telly Savalas. Episodes: *Walking Distance*, *The Lonely*, *Mirror Image*, *Long Live Walter Jameson*, *Eye of the Beholder*, *Nick of Time*, *The Rip Van Winkle Caper*, *The Silence*, *Will The Real Martian Please Stand Up*, *It's A Good Life*, *Five Characters In Search of An Exit*, *To Serve Man*, *Death Ship*, *Living Doll*, *Night Call*. Digital mono. (NR) 416 min. CLV 8 sides. \$99.95. FoxVideo.

This box is missing some of the *The Twilight Zone's* most celebrated episodes, but it 15 shows represent the series well and are supported by videotaped interviews with Rod Serling from the early 1970s. He only discusses one show ("The Silence") in specific terms, but what he says about the art of writing is both enlightening and entertaining.

Writing is what set *The Twilight Zone* apart from its competitors. The show managed to capture lots of raw human emotion in the space of 24 minutes on a fairly reliable weekly basis; the acting and directing followed from there.

Free Spirits:

Julie Harris and Claire Bloom search for spooks in *The Haunting*.



"Walking Distance," which opens the box with ■ low-key story about a troubled businessman (Gig Young) who finds himself stepping back 30 years into his own past, was one of Serling's most personal scripts, and the actors turn in some of their best work. We're also treated to players such as Jack Klugman—as a spaceship commander in "Death Ship"—working successfully in highly uncharacteristic roles. Five shows feature the series' trademark dark twist endings. These hold up the least well, despite the overall excellence of episodes like "Night Call" and "The Silence."

Marc Scott Zicree's notes reveal much about the inner workings of Serling and the show, although they do lapse into trivialities. The mastering is very good, with rich contrast and full sound throughout. —Bruce Eder

The Haunting

1963. B&W. Julie Harris, Claire Bloom, Richard Johnson; dir. Robert Wise. Digital mono, letterboxed. (NR) 112 min. CLV 2 sides \$34.98. MGM/UA.

I wish that the famous opening paragraph of Shirley Jackson's novel *The Haunting of Hill House* had been recited unchanged in the movie version, *The Haunting*. That's really my only complaint. Though a tad stodgy in spots, it remains one of the best ghost stories on film.

When Dr. John Markway (Richard Johnson) assembles a little ghost-hunting party at Hill House, whose eccentric and misanthropic creator lost two wives there just for starters, he's interested in scientific breakthrough, not in people. He fails to realize until too late that one of his guests, Eleanor Lance (Julie Harris) was in desperate psychological straits when she arrived, and the horrid noises, cold spots and other inexplicable doings are steadily sending her toward

flat-out madness.

Robert Wise puts on ■ grand show, using stylized sets, judicious sound and light effects, odd camera angles and wide-angle lenses to suggest dread without actually showing anything. He gets ■ lot of help from Harris, who puts on ■ virtuoso show of her own. The lesbian roommate was probably a cliché character even in 1963, but Claire Bloom has ■ fine time playing her.

Those sets, and Wise's use of wide-screen composition to rev up tension among the characters, make the letterboxing essential. The source print is battered in the beginning but fine afterwards. —Sol Louis Siegel

The Enemy Below

1957. Robert Mitchum, Curt Jurgens, Theodore Bikel; dir. Dick Powell. Digital stereo, letterboxed. (NR) 97 min. CLV 2 sides. \$59.95. FoxVideo.

The Enemy Below was the first major World War II drama to present Allied and Axis combatants as moral equals. Robert Mitchum and Curt Jurgens play the commanders of ■ U.S. destroyer and a German U-Boat engaged in a prolonged duel in the South Atlantic, and their performances are every bit as engrossing as the film's superb special effects. Each is depicted as an essentially honorable man forced into destructive acts by the war, and both actors are beautifully understated in their performances. Producer/director Dick Powell displays a deft hand in balancing the action and drama in this classic picture, which became the dramatic model for ■ dozen bigger-budget movies to follow.

FoxVideo has done a brilliant job on the film-to-tape transfer, with letterboxing that is almost spot-on 2.35:1, but the disc's greatest joy is its depth of color and contrast, ■ breakthrough for 1950s Deluxe Color on video. The fleshtones are perfect in virtually every shot, and

the night scenes and underwater sequences are intoxicating. For all of those virtues, the price is still \$10 higher than it should be. At least Fox has done everything there was to do with this title, short of including the trailer and (assuming it still exists) Powell's alternate, downbeat ending. —**Bruce Eder**



Remembering Patsy

1993. Loretta Lynn, George Jones, k.d. lang; wr./dir. Mark Hall. Digital stereo. (NR) 50 min. CLV 1 side \$29.95. Pioneer Artists.

Willie Nelson: My Life

1993. Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, Ray Charles; wr./dir. Mark Hall. Digital stereo. (NR) 60 min. CLV 1 side \$29.95. Pioneer Artists.

Once Nashville got wired for cable, it was only a matter of time before MTV permeated the hallowed heritage of Music City. But when lightweight laser-fare like *Remembering Patsy* and *Willie Nelson: My Life* appear, it's safe to say that we've entered the era of the "countumentary."

The tragedy of Patsy Cline is that her meteoric career was snuffed so quickly that it's almost adequately covered in the 50-minute *Remembering Patsy*, a pastiche of recent interviews, home movies and kinescopes from her scant six years in the spotlight. But fans who buy this based on the package blurb promising "10 rare television appearances recently discovered and never before seen on home video" will find said treasures (including stunning performances of "Walkin' After Midnight" and "Crazy") hacked and yakked over in

the worst tradition of bio-video. *Willie Nelson: My Life* turns longevity into a curse as the producers try to squeeze Shotgun Willie's six decades (and an extremely complex career) into an hour with predictably incoherent results.

One area in which these programs do succeed is where they allow the subjects' contemporaries and disciples to discuss the music business and the music itself. *Remembering Patsy* features lucid commentary from k.d. lang about the essence of Cline's recording technique. An account by Roy Clark of Cline's refusal to bow to record company pressure and "steal" one of his songs is particularly touching. Likewise, *Willie Nelson: My Life* offers an interesting peek at the politics of songwriting as well as an appreciation of Willie's perpetual nose-thumbing at the Nashville music establishment.

—**John Walker**

Wait Until Dark

1967. Audrey Hepburn, Alan Arkin; dir. Terence Young. Digital mono. (NR) 108 min. CLV 2 sides \$34.98. Warner.

When first released in 1967, *Wait Until Dark* was a fascinating study in contradiction: a star vehicle for the ultra-classy Audrey Hepburn (who received an Academy Award nomination) marketed with a gimmick worthy of William Castle. Based on the Broadway play by Frederick Knott, *Wait Until Dark* is a night in the life of a very unlucky lady named Susy Hendrix. Blinded in an accident, Susy is finally getting her bearings with the help of husband Sam (Efrem Zimbalist, Jr.). But the stage is set for trouble during the opening credits: Sam returns from a business trip and is duped by a volup-

tuous frequent flyer into holding a doll stuffed to the pigtailed with heroin. Now the coveted toy is somewhere in Sam and Susy's Greenwich Village flat, and some very bad men want it back.

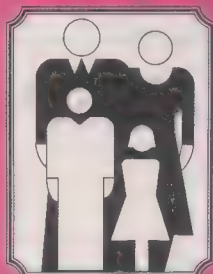
The balance of *Wait Until Dark* is a drama within a drama as the evil Roat (played to sleazy perfection by Alan Arkin) and a pair of hapless con men (Richard Crenna and Jack Weston) concoct a scenario intended to trick home-alone Susy into revealing the doll's whereabouts. One hitch: She doesn't know where it is.

Susy's showdown with Roat takes a bizarre turn when the lights go out and a box of matches becomes the currency of power. Oh, and that gimmick? In 1967, theaters were encouraged to turn down their safety bulbs to the absolute legal limit during the climactic scene to create a "real-light" environment. So turn off that hall lamp, draw the shades and toss a towel over the digital clock.

Wait Until Dark is handsomely transferred in its original widescreen ratio and includes the original theatrical trailer. —**JW**



Cat and Mouse:
Wait Until Dark's
Crenna and Hepburn



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DIRECTORY

HIGHLIGHTS

Arsenic and Old Lace

1944. B&W. Cary Grant, Josephine Hull, Priscilla Lane, Raymond Massey, Peter Lorre; dir. Frank Capra. If you like comedies about mass-murderers... Two old ladies lay lonely old gentlemen to rest in their basement while nephew Grant double-takes broad comedy acting to new heights. Mono. (NR) 120 min. LD \$34.98. MGM/UA.

Dashiell Hammett's The Dain Curse

1993. James Coburn, Hector Elizondo, Jean Simmons; dir. E.W. Swackhamer. Already re-edited from miniseries into feature format, Hammett's most colorful yarn now comes out as collector's edition producer's (Martin Poll) cut. Includes biographical info on Hammett. (NR) 138 min. VHS only, \$92.95. Enterprise.

Forever

1992. Sean Young, Keith Coogan, Diane Ladd; dir. Thomas Palmer Jr. MTV director moves to haunted house and must choose between a beautiful ghost and his agent (both impossible to get hold of when you need them). Mono. (R) 93 min. VHS only, \$89.95. Prism.

Heart and Souls

1993. Robert Downey Jr., Charles Grodin, Kyra Sedgwick; dir. Ron Underwood. Young exec born at the moment four bus

passengers die has body taken over by each, as they attempt to help him and resolve their own unfinished business. Surround. (PG-13) 103 min. VHS priced for rental. LD letterboxed or full-frame \$34.98. MCA/Universal.

Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday

1993. Kane Hodder; dir. Sean Cunningham. The Final Friday? Right. Anyone remember *The Final Chapter* back in '84? But with \$15 million box office gross (and I do mean gross), who'd kill off the ghoul that lays golden eggs? Surround. (R) 89 min. or (NR) 91 min. VHS priced for rental. LD \$39.99. New Line.

Last Action Hero

1993. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Austin O'Brien, Mercedes Ruehl; dir. John McTiernan. Excitable kid enters movie hero's world of guns, fast cars and loud explosions. Too many script writers, too few script readers. (PG-13) 131 min. VHS priced for rental. LD \$39.95. Columbia TriStar.

Last Light

1993. Kiefer Sutherland, Forest Whitaker, Amanda Plummer; dir. Sutherland. Death-row guard with troubled past and failing present develops relationship with condemned man that rekindles his humanity. Stereo. (R) 104 min. VHS only, \$92.95. Vidmark.

Compiled by Josef Krebs

Labels For Less

A host of titles to get you thinking about summer travel: MCA/Universal gets you to the *Airport* and off to Europe with *The List of Adrian Messenger* and *Bedtime Story* (\$19.98 each), while Republic Pictures will send you cheaper yet by boat in *Father Goose*, *Operation Petticoat* and *The Fighting Seabees*, each at \$14.98. Try paying \$9.98 and you'll end up in *The Cruel Sea*. Having arrived, MGM/UA puts you up at the *Hotel Paradiso* and you go in search of *The Lover*, each of which will cost you \$19.98.

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—JK

George C. Scott and Julie Christie in *Petulia*.



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1993. Karina Lombard, Rachel Ward, Michael York; dir. John Duigan. What turned a conventional Englishman into the legendary Rochester? Jean Rhys' best-selling prequel to *Jane Eyre* tells all; three film versions let you choose how much all. Stereo. (R). (NC-17) and (NR) versions, 98 min. VHS priced for rental. LD \$39.99. New Line.

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1993. Dir. Yoshiaki Kawajiri. Evil tyrant builds the Demon City in a collapsing Tokyo. Only cute girl and kid sister can save world and rescue dad. Violent Japanese animation. Stereo, subtitled. (NR) 82 min. VHS only, \$29.95. Central Park Media.

Frisbee Dogs: Training Video

1991. Host Peter Bloeme. Not just another canine health and fitness video, this tape's also about doggie bonding, without which millions of dogs end up in shelters. Stereo. 30 min. VHS only, \$19.95. Kit (including Frisbee) \$24.95. Skydog Productions. (800) 543-1840.

George Washington

1984. Barry Bostwick, Patty Duke Astin, Jaclyn Smith; dir. Buzz Kulik. From destitution to revolution—the life, loves and wars of the man who wouldn't be king. Also

available: *George Washington: The Forging of a Nation*. Surround. (NR) 398 min. VHS priced for rental. MGM/UA.

Israel: A Nation Is Born

1992. Harry Truman, Anwar Sadat, Itzhak Rabin; Nar. Abba Eban, dir. Zvi Almog. Five-part series on Israel, including its painful birth, the Six Day War, the Yom Kippur War and events up to the present peace accord. Mono. 300 min. VHS only, \$149.95. Sisu (800-223-7478).

Karajan—Early Images: Volume 2

1965-6. Herbert von Karajan, Yehudi Menuhin; dir. Henri-Georges Clouzot. A rare chance to see Karajan's greatness as an accompanist, in his only recording with Menuhin, as well as as a conductor with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. Both captured on film by Clouzot. Mono/stereo. 89 min. VHS \$29.95. LD \$34.95. Deutsche Grammophon.

The Louvre 200

1993. 200th anniversary series on its history (*A Museum in Time*), collection (*Selected Pieces*) and influence on artists (*At the Louvre with the Masters*). Mono. 60 min each. VHS \$29.95 each, series \$79.95. Public Media.

Know Your Legal Rights: Bankruptcy

1992. Gene Grossman; dir. Gene Pasquini. Recession depression? This tape may be the answer. If huge corporations are using the most useful government program—bankruptcy—why shouldn't you? Stereo. 100 min. VHS only, \$39.95. Magic Lamp Productions. (800) 367-9661

Well Sexy Women: The Lesbian Woman's Guide to Safer Sex

1993. Dir. The Unconscious Collective. Features foreplay, fetishes, fantasies, coming out, sex myths, STDs and stuff you don't talk about with your doctor. Erotic, graphic, honest. Stereo. 60 min. VHS only, \$39.95. Greenwood/Cooper. (800) 959-9843.

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1993 comp. B&W. Includes *Free and Easy*, *Doughboys*, *Sidewalks of New York*, *The Passionate Plummer*, *What! No Beer?*, *Speak Easily*, *Parlor, Bedroom and Bath*. Mono. (NR) 547 min. Boxed LD set \$139.98. MGM/UA.

Runaway Train

1985. Jon Voight, Eric Roberts, Rebecca DeMornay; dir. Andrei Konchalovsky. Existential action movie adapted from ■ Kurosawa screenplay about prison escapees hiding out on a train driven by a dead man. Stereo. (R) 111 min. LD letterboxed \$34.98. MGM/UA

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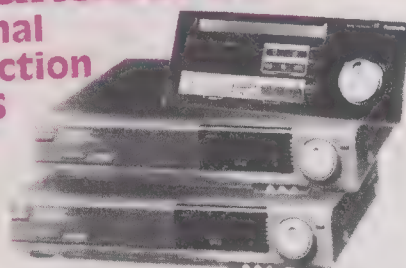
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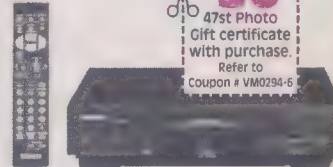


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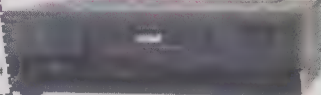
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HI-DEF DECK

continued from page 37

er than those in 8mm transports. Like 8mm machines, HDTV VCRs will rely solely on helical-scan recording (using a rotating head drum), with no linear heads for erasing or audio and control track recording.

Because the transport is so small, the dimensions of the VCR will shrink. We predict that some manufacturers will make decks that are about as wide as most audio equipment (19 inches), but very slim—they'll be able to reduce the profile because of the slender tape. Other manufacturers will probably make decks more like Sony's tiny Hi8 EV-C100, which is miniature compared with any VHS deck.

In theory, the smaller size of the transport would make very small HDTV camcorders possible, but in practice, pocket-sized HDTV camcorders probably won't appear for at least a decade. It takes four times as many pixels in a CCD to record HDTV images, and it will probably take engineers years to pack that many pixels into the 1/3-inch sensor typically used in 8mm and VHS-C camcorders. Until they do, the focal length of an HDTV camcorder's lens will be quite long, so you'll have a transport smaller than that of Sony's Handycam Snap, but a lens as big as those used on Canon's A1-series camcorders.

The transport will accommodate both HDTV tape sizes, but without the hassle of an adapter for smaller tapes, as required to play VHS-C tapes on a VHS machine. All you'll have to do is push the smaller tape in, because the VCR will have a slight indentation to serve as a guide for the smaller tapes. We suspect that the VCR's tape spindles will move to accommodate the two shell sizes.

With digital video recording, only two heads will be needed—no use for special-effects heads or hi-fi audio heads. Like 8mm VCRs, all HDTV decks will have a flying erase head, giving all the decks the ability to perform insert edits.

In fact, HDTV editing decks should blow away anything that's available right now in S-VHS or Hi8—if the American standard borrows the Japanese standard's new and very practical track layout. The format will allow video dubbing (which 8mm and Hi8 won't currently do) and digital audio dubbing (which VHS and S-VHS can't do).

The contents of the track begin at the bottom with a segment for ITI, or Insert and Track Information, which

serves a similar function to the control track on VHS tape. Because the ITI will mark the frame's location, the video signal won't be needed to locate a frame, as with 8mm (unless the 8mm deck has RC time code), so video dubbing will be no problem. We assume the ITI will also include time code, allowing frame-accurate editing.

After the ITI comes the digital audio. By the Japanese standard, this will perform 16-bit stereo recording at 48, 44.1 or 23 kilohertz, or 12-bit four-channel recording at 32 kHz. On American decks, four-channel recording probably won't be needed, because Dolby AC-3 encoding (the basis of Dolby Surround Digital) will be used to squeeze five tracks plus a subwoofer track into a stereo 44.1-kHz recording.

Next comes the video track, followed by a subcode track used for identification and other data, much like the data track in a DCC recording. Potential applications for the subcode might include closed captioning, tagging recorded shows with titles so you can easily find out what's on a certain section of tape, and adding textual commentary from moviemakers.

The controls of the deck will probably be identical to those of your current VCR, with the possible deletion of some transport functions like speed play, variable-speed search and jog/shuttle control. One difference may be the inclusion of circuitry and controls for an onscreen programming guide, like Star-Sight or TV Guide On Screen. These guides will show you what's on for the next month or so, even if you subscribe to a 500-channel cable system by the time HDTV arrives. They'll also let you use onscreen menus to mark shows you want to record. The VCR will use this programming information for timeshifting, so you won't have to enter codes or date/time/channel information.

No matter how many of our predictions turn out to be correct, these new decks are likely to solve many of the problems that have caused the love/hate relationship most videophiles and home videography enthusiasts have with their VCRs. Say goodbye to editing inaccuracy, low-quality audio dubs, generation loss and having to use your camcorder to play tapes. And say hello to the VCR of your dreams. ■

Now that you've heard our ideas on what the HDTV VCR will be like, we'd like to hear your ideas—and any suggestions you have for features that manufacturers should incorporate into these new machines. Send your suggestions to HDTV VCR, Video Magazine, 460 West 34 Street, New York, NY 10001.

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GR-AX35 GR-SX90
GR-AX55 GR-SZ1
GR-AX75

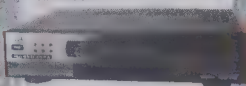


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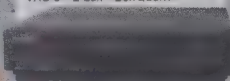
JVC Editing

JX-T88 JX-S300
JX-T66 JX-S900
JX-SV55 CG-V80
JX-S100



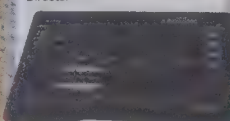
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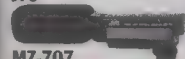
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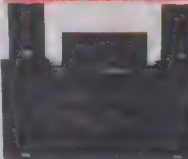
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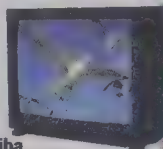
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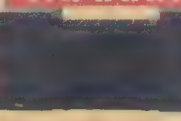
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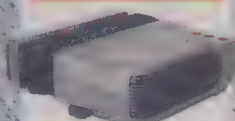
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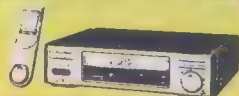
JVC GRAX55

Hitachi VTM53A

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VHS VCRs



JVC HRVP700U

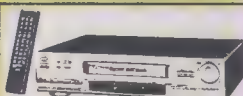
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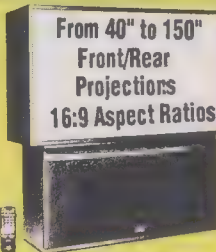
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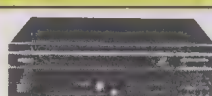


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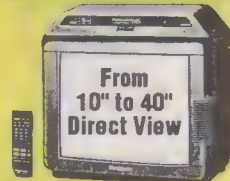
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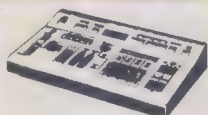
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- Approximately how many hours per day do you watch TV?
0-2 E ☐ 3-5 F ☐ 6-10 G ☐
- How far in advance do you plan your TV viewing?
1 hour H ☐ 1 day I ☐ 1 week J ☐ No Planning K ☐
- Do you tape "series" programming (i.e. soap operas, mini-series)?
Yes L ☐ No M ☐
- Which sources do you use to plan TV viewing?
Daily Newspaper N ☐ Cable Guide O ☐ Weekly Newspaper Insert P ☐
TV Guide Q ☐ Other R ☐
- How many programs do you tape per week?
1-5 S ☐ 5-7 T ☐ 7+ U ☐
- If programming your VCR was made easier would you record additional shows?
Yes V ☐ No W ☐
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| 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
| 31 | 32 | 33 | 34 | 35 | 36 | 37 | 38 | 39 | 40 | 41 | 42 | 43 | 44 | 45 |
| 46 | 47 | 48 | 49 | 50 | 51 | 52 | 53 | 54 | 55 | 56 | 57 | 58 | 59 | 60 |
| 61 | 62 | 63 | 64 | 65 | 66 | 67 | 68 | 69 | 70 | 71 | 72 | 73 | 74 | 75 |
| 76 | 77 | 78 | 79 | 80 | 81 | 82 | 83 | 84 | 85 | 86 | 87 | 88 | 89 | 90 |
| 91 | 92 | 93 | 94 | 95 | 96 | 97 | 98 | 99 | 100 | 101 | 102 | 103 | 104 | 105 |
| 106 | 107 | 108 | 109 | 110 | 111 | 112 | 113 | 114 | 115 | 116 | 117 | 118 | 119 | 120 |
| 121 | 122 | 123 | 124 | 125 | 126 | 127 | 128 | 129 | 130 | 131 | 132 | 133 | 134 | 135 |
| 136 | 137 | 138 | 139 | 140 | 141 | 142 | 143 | 144 | 145 | 146 | 147 | 148 | 149 | 150 |
| 151 | 152 | 153 | 154 | 155 | 156 | 157 | 158 | 159 | 160 | 161 | 162 | 163 | 164 | 165 |
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- Approximately how many hours per day do you watch TV?
0-2 E ☐ 3-5 F ☐ 6-10 G ☐
- How far in advance do you plan your TV viewing?
1 hour H ☐ 1 day I ☐ 1 week J ☐ No Planning K ☐
- Do you tape "series" programming (i.e. soap operas, mini-series)?
Yes L ☐ No M ☐
- Which sources do you use to plan TV viewing?
Daily Newspaper N ☐ Cable Guide O ☐ Weekly Newspaper Insert P ☐
TV Guide Q ☐ Other R ☐
- How many programs do you tape per week?
1-5 S ☐ 5-7 T ☐ 7+ U ☐
- If programming your VCR was made easier would you record additional shows?
Yes V ☐ No W ☐
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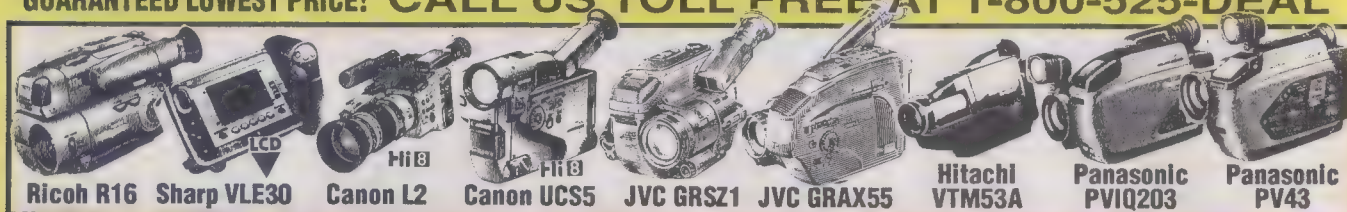
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| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
| 31 | 32 | 33 | 34 | 35 | 36 | 37 | 38 | 39 | 40 | 41 | 42 | 43 | 44 | 45 |
| 46 | 47 | 48 | 49 | 50 | 51 | 52 | 53 | 54 | 55 | 56 | 57 | 58 | 59 | 60 |
| 61 | 62 | 63 | 64 | 65 | 66 | 67 | 68 | 69 | 70 | 71 | 72 | 73 | 74 | 75 |
| 76 | 77 | 78 | 79 | 80 | 81 | 82 | 83 | 84 | 85 | 86 | 87 | 88 | 89 | 90 |
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| 121 | 122 | 123 | 124 | 125 | 126 | 127 | 128 | 129 | 130 | 131 | 132 | 133 | 134 | 135 |
| 136 | 137 | 138 | 139 | 140 | 141 | 142 | 143 | 144 | 145 | 146 | 147 | 148 | 149 | 150 |
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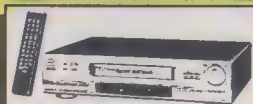
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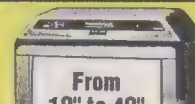
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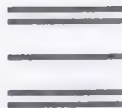
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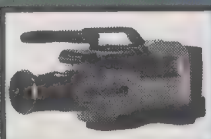
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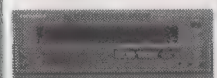


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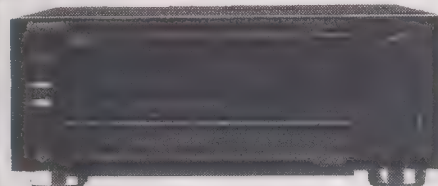
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AG-455

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Panasonic CAMCORDER



AG-195

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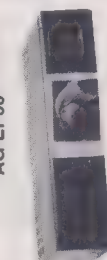
Panasonic EDIT SYSTEM



AG-1970

S-VHS/VHS editing, insert and assemble edit, Hi-Fi Stereo sound, Jog shuttle search, and Multiple programmable edits

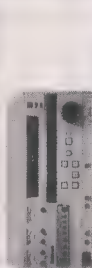
Panasonic AG-EP60



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Panasonic AG-7650H / AG-7750H / AG-A770



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SONY EVW-300



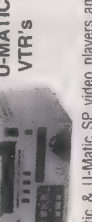
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VIDEO/DATA PROJECTORS



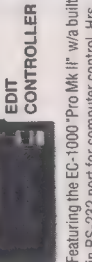
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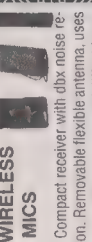
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BETA

continued from page 44

high-grade stereo VCR.

We chortled Beta is Better again when the copyguard system Macrovision was encoded by duplicators onto hot VHS titles to thwart people from making watchable VHS dubs. Then and now, Macrovision causes no disturbances on Beta-made copies of protected VHS originals. (Maybe this explains why prerecorded Beta tape sales are so slim.)

While stubbornly slow to sense the need for longer recording times, Sony eventually extended playing time per tape to three hours (Beta II), then to 4-1/2 hours (Beta III), adequately countering VHS' extension to four- and six-hour modes, or so devotees believed. In hindsight, even Sony admits its tape time-lag was Beta's ultimate undoing. It's the reason industry giant RCA threw its weight behind VHS, instead of Beta.

Later came the surprise picture refinement of SuperBeta, which tweaked the format's horizontal resolution past the 230-to-250-line range of VHS and the original Beta without the need for new, costlier tape formulations. Still later, we were treated to ED-Beta, a stunning semipro, 500-line format that knocked the specs off the VHS camp's simultaneously announced, 400-line S-VHS upgrade, at least on paper.

For a brief spell in the late '70s, Beta enjoyed almost half the VCR market. Total VCR sales were restrained, however, by the profusion and confusion of rival home video formats. When RCA jumped into the fray with the first four-hour VHS VCR in the fall of 1977, you could feel the see-saw tilting off balance. Former rivals in the U.S. and Japanese electronics business began to line up behind VHS, and pressed retailers to sell only one type of VCR "to avoid further customer confusion and buying indecision."

Many video stores also became convinced that VHS was the better way to fly. Why carry double inventory, when one format sells two or three times more decks than the other?

Beta's popularity began eroding seriously in the '80s. Electronic Industries Association statistics tell the tale: 900,000 Betas were shipped to the U.S. versus 3.1 million VHS decks in 1983. Two years later, the public snapped up an even more respectable 1.4 million Beta VCRs. Unfortunately for Beta, in that same year folks bought more than 10 million VHS machines.

continued on page 86

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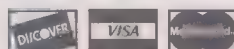
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| TR-31 NEW | CALL |
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| FX 710 LIMITED SUPPLY | 787 |
| FX 520 | 617 |
| FX 420 | 597 |
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\$747

JVC

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- EIS STABILIZE
- COLOR VIEWFINDER



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| UCS1 | 687 |
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| E250 STEREO | 597 |
| E67 STEREO | 567 |
| E65 10X | 547 |
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| E620 NEW | CALL |
| E700 NEW | CALL |
| H850 HI-8...LIMITED | 787 |
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R-18H

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| 8-848 | 887 | 8-438 | 587 |
| 8-808 | 777 | 8-428 | 577 |
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- 1 LUX
- DIGITAL EIS
- COLOR DIGITAL FADE



\$1047

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| PV-53 COLOR VF | 827 |
| PV-43 STABILIZER | 827 |
| PV-10503 | 697 |
| PV-10403 | 647 |
| PV-760 DIGITAL | 887 |
| PVS-770 | 987 |
| PV-810 | CALL |
| PV-800 | 547 |
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| AG-3 3CCD VHSC | 2397 |
| AG-460 | 2497 |
| AG-455 | 1577 |
| AG-450 | 1147 |
| AG-195 | 897 |
| VW-D5100 | CALL |
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| WJMX-50 | 4397 |
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| VJ-AVE5 | 1187 |
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| AG-1740 | CALL |
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| VR-506 | CALL | VR-667 | CALL |
| VR-526 | CALL | VR-720 | CALL |
| VR-537 | CALL | VR-800 HF | 427 |

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| HSU-58 | 487 | HS-U68 | 617 |
| HS-U82 | | | 1147 |

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| HRJ-400 | CALL | HRS-4900 | CALL |
| HR 404 | CALL | HRS-6800 | 597 |
| HR-606 | CALL | HRS-6900 | CALL |
| HR-604 | CALL | HRD-850 | LTD |



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| VHS | |
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| SLV-700 | 337 |
| SLV-R 1000 | IN STOCK |
| 8mm | |
| EVC-100 | 487 |
| EVS-2000CALL | |
| GVM-20 | CALL |
| SLV-750 | 387 |
| SLV-900 | 417 |
| EVA-50 | CALL |
| EVS-3000 | CALL |
| EVS-50 | 717 |

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| PV-2301 |187 | PV-4351 |287 |
| PV-4301 |207 | PV-4361 |347 |
| PV-4311 |217 | PV-4362 |367 |
| PV-4314 |237 | PV-4380 |707 |
| PV-4900 |CALL | | |
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| PV-M2023 | ..477 | PV-M1323 | ...397 |

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| VT-270 | CALL | VT-482 | CALL |
| VT-272 | CALL | VT-551 | CALL |
| VT-370 | CALL | VT-772 | CALL |



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| VXS-D902S | 687 |
| VXS-D702S | 507 |
| VXS-D602S | 437 |
| VXS-6128 | 337 |
| VXS-602 | 307 |
| VXS-402 | 187 |
| SK-312R | 177 |
| SK-251R | 157 |

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| RX-905 VTN | CALL | XL-2451 TN | CALL |
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| STR-D 511 ..187 | STR-D 1011 ..387 |
| STR-D 611 ..227 | STR-D 2090 ..587 |
| STR-D 711 ..267 | |
| LASER DISCS | |
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| MPD-600 ...CALL | MDP-K5727 |
| CD'S | |
| CDP-C910727 | CCP-C435187 |
| CDP-C735287 | CCP-C335187 |
| CCP-C825227 | CCP-C235147 |
| CCP-C535227 | |

VIDEOONICS

| | | | |
|------------------|-----|-----------------|------|
| EDIT MAKER..... | 487 | COLOR WTR..... | 237 |
| TITLE MAKER..... | 387 | PRO ED/M 3..... | 147 |
| THUMBS UP..... | 187 | FX ED/M 4..... | 227 |
| EQUALIZER..... | 227 | FX ED/M 5..... | CALL |
| BOING BOX..... | 147 | SCRN WTR..... | 147 |
| CITIZEN | | | |
| M-329..... | 147 | VIDEO PROP..... | 37 |
| M-938..... | 247 | SPM 3..... | 57 |
| TV TUNER..... | 77 | SPM 4..... | 77 |
| CAR ADAPTER..... | 17 | SPM 5..... | CALL |
| AC ADAPTER..... | 17 | SPM 7..... | CALL |

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|---------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| JXT-88..... | 387 | C2200 A..... | 57 |
| JXS-V55..... | 387 | C2200..... | 47 |
| JXS-300..... | 187 | CV300 A..... | 77 |
| JXS-900..... | 487 | CV-300..... | 47 |
| MZ-707..... | 137 | CV-320..... | 37 |
| AMBICO | | CV-20S AUTO..... | 67 |
| V-6300..... | 267 | READY LIGHT..... | 47 |
| V-6350..... | 187 | APT-200 A..... | 137 |
| NADY | | AZDEN | |
| 151-VR..... | 187 | ALL IN STOCK | |
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- PV-Q 403 Color Viewfinder.....Call
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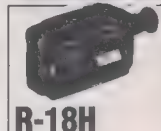
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CC517

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- Flying Erase Head
- 2 Lux Minimum Illumination
- Quick-Response Infrared Autofocus
- Digital Signal Processing

RICOH



R-18H

- RICOH OPTICS
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- PROGRAM AE
- WIRELESS REMOTE
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CC180

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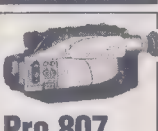
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GR-AW1

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- Digital Superimpose with 8 Colors
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Pro 807

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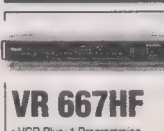
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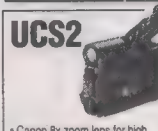
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- Quick-Response Infrared Autofocus

SONY



CC187

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- 3 Lux Minimum Illumination
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- Full-Range AutoFocus System
- 16x9 Recording

SONY

EDITORS

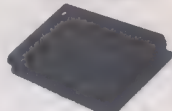


- XV-T33.....Sketch Titler
- XV-C900.....Color Corrector
- RM-E700.....Edit Controller
- HVT-80A.....Film-to-Video Converter
- SB-V700.....Switcher
- SB-V900.....Matrix Switcher

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- Title Maker.....Call
- Sound Effects Mixer.....Call

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- CG-V60.....Char. Generator.....Call

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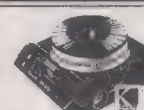


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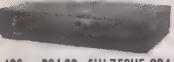
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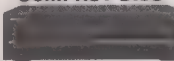
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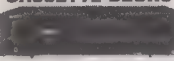
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| STR-D 1011.....389.99 | STR-D 611.....228.99 |
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SONY COMPACT DISC



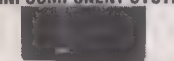
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| CDP-C335.....164.99 | CDP-C625.....224.99 |
| CDP-C435.....184.99 | CDP-C735.....269.99 |
| CDP-C535.....229.99 | CDP-C910.....269.99 |
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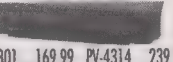
Panasonic

CAMCORDERS



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| PV-562.....989.99 | PV-5770.....969.99 |
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| PV-10203.....524.99 | PV-710.....569.99 |
| PV-10303.....549.99 | PV-760.....809.99 |
| PV-10403.....599.99 | PV-800.....544.99 |
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| | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
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| PV-4210.....199.99 | PV-4351.....249.99 |
| PV-4250.....254.99 | PV-4361.....309.99 |
| PV-4260.....279.99 | PV-4362.....339.99 |
| PV-4262.....299.99 | PV-54266.....374.99 |
| PV-4264.....364.99 | PV-54270.....389.99 |
| PV-4301.....189.99 | PV-54280.....559.99 |
| PV-4311.....209.99 | PV-54366.....434.99 |
| PV-54380.....709.99 | |

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| AG-1270.....239.99 | AG-1970.....CALL |
| AG-1280.....CALL | AG-5700.....1149.99 |
| AG-1740.....329.99 | AG-W1.....CALL |

PRO CAMCORDERS

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|--------------------|--------------------|
| AG-186.....CALL | AG-460.....2249.99 |
| AG-455.....1499.99 | AG-3.....2239.99 |

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| WJ-AV5.....1139.99 | WJ-MX30.....2449.99 |
| WJ-AV3.....329.99 | WJ-MX12.....1489.99 |
| WJ-T115.....204.99 | AG-A96.....339.99 |
| WJ-MX50.....CALL | CT-1383V.....239.99 |

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| CLD-D502.....449.99 | CLD-M301.....369.99 |
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 KARAOKE CLD-V820.....599.99
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| PD-TM2.....294.99 | PD-M702.....179.99 |
| PD-DM902.....259.99 | PD-M552.....159.99 |
| PD-M501.....249.99 | PD-M502.....154.99 |

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RCA

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| PRO 808.....CALL | CC-178.....CALL |
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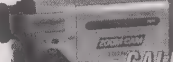
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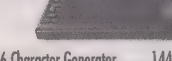


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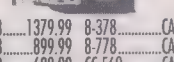


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continued from page 82

A proud Sony tenaciously stood by Beta as a consumer format until January, 1988, when it finally bowed to market realities and introduced its first VHS VCRs. That year, Beta machine sales drooped to 242,000. Twelve months later, the B-ster couldn't count to 100,000, while VHS charged along at 10 million units per annum, a real balance-of-trade buster.

By 1990, the last available year of EIA sales figures for half-inch video formats, Beta deck sales had shrunk to a minuscule 20,000. At this point, Sony probably evoked the EIA's "50 percent rule," which allows a manufacturer dominating a format to keep its numbers quiet. Ironically, just a year later, Sony was proclaiming video sales leadership in high-end, VHS VCRs, a status the company still maintains.

BETA NOW OR NEVER?

Today, Sony no longer offers any ultra-expensive (\$3,000 to \$8,000) downwardly compatible ED Beta decks or camcorders, suggesting that prosumer Hi8 gear is much more practical and affordable. But Beta devotees can take comfort in the fact that Sony still makes a trio of SuperBeta VCRs.

To replace your old belt-driven monaural model, there's the direct drive SL-S600, introduced in 1990 at a \$449 price. Its newest deck is the SL-HF200, unwrapped last spring at a \$799 price. The SL-HF200 is reasonably well featured and boasts a user-friendly "Context Sensitive" onscreen programming system, Beta IIs playback, as well as hi-fi recording at the II and III speeds, MTS stereo reception, a tape stabilizer and front-panel A/V jacks.

But Betaphiles save their reverence for 1991's 15th anniversary special edition, the \$1,699 SL-HF2100, a beefy 24 pounder with a host of refinements, like Opt-4 video heads, which are unique in that one wider pair records while another narrower pair plays back, the better to avoid adjacent channel interference. It also has dual flying erase heads that electronically slice razor clean edits. It functions in the ultrasharp B1 Super High Band mode for nearly perfect copying, and has multistage digital signal processing, a heavy-duty chassis and shielding, and a unique, two-way LCD touch-screen remote that's very sexy.

What can Betaphiles look forward to? Sony won't say and Beta products have a logic all their own. "We don't put new Beta models out based on a conventional analysis of their likely sales," says Jim Bonan, Sony's vice president of home video products. "Financially, I

continued on page 92

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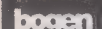
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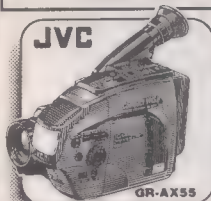
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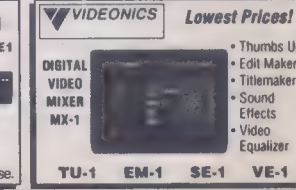
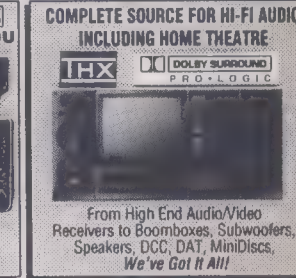
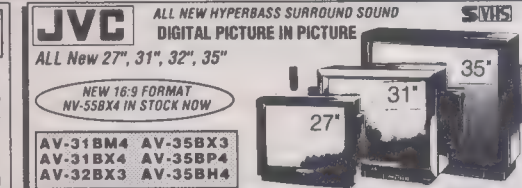
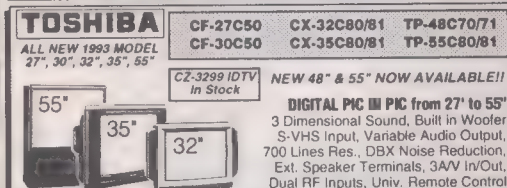
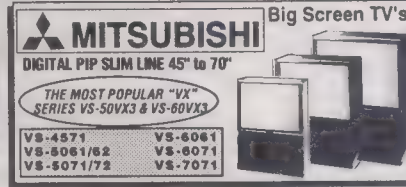
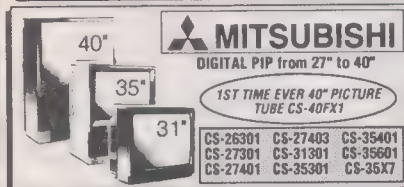
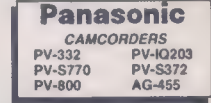
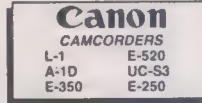
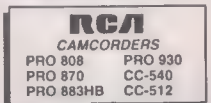
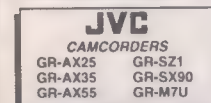
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| March 1994 | 12/30/93 | 1694 |
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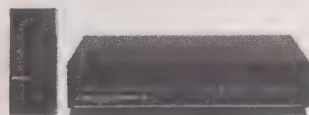
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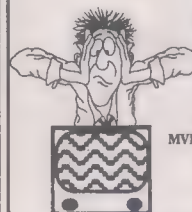
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don't think it's a sensible thing to do, but that's not what it's about," he explains. "It's about a continuing commitment to Beta customers. We estimate there are 2 to 3 million people with Beta machines at home. True, a lot are in the closet, replaced by Sony VHS machines, but Betaphiles are our most vocal customers. They're very dedicated, and we don't want to just walk away from them."

This is quite a departure from the usual way manufacturers toss out the old and dive into the new, Bonan adds. "Manufacturers typically don't support old formats." (Tried to find a videotape for your Quasar Time Machine or Sanyo V-Cord lately?)

Actually, today's market in pre-recorded Beta tapes is a lot like that for long playing records. Select titles on Beta are offered by manufacturers only during "pre-release" ordering periods. Much of the product ships "one-way," meaning no returns are allowed. "Sometimes the orders are delivered, sometimes not," says Richard Levine of Beta Library in Richardson, Texas. "If you call back three weeks later to reorder, you're told it's too late."

Levine says he's asked several major studios to just give him reproducible masters of new titles on Hi8 or Betacam. He would make and sell custom Beta dubs to order and pass commissions along to the studios. "But these guys don't get it," says a frustrated Levine. "They give you a blank stare, or say something like 'How do we know you're not going to sell thousands and not pay us?' To which I respond, 'If you think there are thousands of Beta tapes to be sold, why don't you make and stock them.' Someday they may wake up. All we can do is hope."

Otherwise, like a good old soldier, Beta will continue its seemingly inevitable course and slowly... fade... away. ■

TECH TIP

Skip the leader

Videotape leaders—the first five to eight inches at the beginning of a tape—often attract dust and dirt. The problem is especially acute with rental tapes. To keep this crud away from your video heads, hit fast forward immediately upon inserting a rented cassette into your VCR. Let the tape run for a few seconds, then hit play.

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Beating the bad back boob-tube blues

Sooner or later most of us are going to suffer from lower back pain, and TV watching may be the culprit. Hours of careless channel surfing, day in and day out, can turn a couch potato into an ouch potato, although few realize their viewing habits might be part of the problem. Back pain is second only to the common cold in keeping people home from work. But your TV shouldn't be the cause. In fact, with the right on-screen advice, it could be the cure.

The problem is the spine's need for support, even when apparently at rest. The spine consists of 24 vertebrae, arranged in three curves approximating an S shape. The lumbar curve—your lower back—supports most of your weight. Sitting motionless for long stretches on a sofa or a soft chair can cause your lumbar curve to flatten or round out in the wrong direction, shifting the strain to your back muscles and the discs that cushion the vertebrae. After a while, your back muscles give up and let the ligaments take over. When the ligaments stretch too much, you feel back pain, stiffness and fatigue.

All this from just sitting around watching TV? You bet your remote, says H. Dwayne Saunders, a Minneapolis

ally worse," says Dr. Stephen Green, a Goshen, New York chiropractor. "To aim your head toward the TV, you prop it on a pillow or two, which puts pressure on the cervical curve. If you lie on a couch, you have to look sideways, often propping your head up on your arm, which again puts pressure on your neck." What about lying on the floor with your hands under your chin, looking up at the TV the way kids often do? "Pure dynamite," warns Saunders.

The healthiest way to watch TV, he advises, is to sit in a seat that supports your back and gives you a relaxed posture. The seat should be directly in front of the TV, which is also the best position to experience the screen's picture and sound.

What kind of seat are we talking about? "The most important thing is good lumbar support, in a chair that's firm, not soft or squooshy," says Dr. Laura Punnett, professor of ergonomics at the University of Massachusetts. "You want padded support behind the lower back, right where you feel the spine curve inward. It's also important that the seat support the length of your back, all the way up to your shoulders."

And it should be just high enough. If the seat's too high, your feet will dangle, putting pressure on the nerves and blood vessels in your thighs. If it's too low, it can strain the pressure point at the base of your torso, causing discomfort and pain.

Choosing the right seat isn't easy. "The typical lounge chair is too

soft," says Ken Harwood, a physical therapist at New York University's Occupational & Industrial Orthopaedic Center. On the other hand, a chair that's too hard, "can cause undue pressure on the skin, which can lead to circulatory disturbances." The angle between the seat and the backrest is important, too. Increasing the angle decreases the pressure on the discs and muscles, says Harwood, explaining why

a reclining lounge chair ("as long as it's firm enough") is thought to be better for your back than a straight chair when you're relaxing.

When you're chair shopping, bring something to keep you busy for 15 or 20 minutes, "because that's how long it's going to take to find out if a chair is really comfortable," says Harwood. "A lot of chairs feel great for 10 minutes, but cause discomfort after a longer time. Take the time to test it."

Less costly fixes can improve chairs you already own. An inexpensive foam lumbar roll, set roughly at your beltline, will support the natural curve in your lower back by minimizing the urge to slouch, according to Shari Hanson, president of Orthopedic Physical Therapy Products, a Minneapolis firm that sells lumbar rolls. "The main thing is to maintain that inward curve."

"But the chair is not as important as your behavior," Harwood emphasizes. "The more we keep fit, the healthier it is for our backs." In other words, get up and exercise. Of course, you should consult a health care professional before beginning any new exercise program, but one sensible way to start, especially for the video inclined, is by watching a tape about back care.

Among several we reviewed, we were particularly impressed by a five-tape series from New Life Options (818-990-5422 for further information) in Sherman Oaks, California, that employs a method called the Mendsieck System. This is a European regimen for dealing with back pain and other spinal problems. The tapes, which include *Freedom From Back Pain* (\$29.95) and individual titles for men, women and seniors, demonstrate the proper way to do such seemingly simple things as sit, stand, walk, lift, even sleep. They all use live models and diagrams and have exceptionally clear directions. We tried the exercises suggested in the tapes, and felt noticeably more limber afterwards.

Finally, consider your taste in videos. For example, good horror and suspense films can cause your muscles to twitch and tighten. "This can aggravate an already stressed back," Harwood warns. But Shari Hansen sees things differently. "At least they'll get you to sit up straight," she counsels.



physical therapist specializing in back-injury prevention. "Sitting puts more pressure on the discs and muscles in your back than standing. That's why truck drivers are in the highest risk group for back injury: They sit for hours in seats that don't support their lower backs. There's not much difference between that and TV watching."

Horizontal viewing—from a couch, a floor or a bed—is no better. "It's actu-

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